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Girls' Agency, Feminist Activism and the Negotiation of Girl Power Discourses in Girl Up

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“Outside of What the UN Want Us to Do”: Girls’ Agency, Feminist Activism and the Negotiation of Girl Power Discourses in Girl Up

Rosemary Clare Walters

A dissertation submitted to the University of Bristol in accordance with the requirements for award
of the degree of PhD in Politics in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law

School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies, May 2019.

Seventy-six thousand, eight hundred and eighty-six.

Abstract

This thesis analyses girls' agency in negotiating girl power discourses in international development. It focuses on the UN Foundation's Girl Up campaign, which encourages girls in the Global North to fundraise towards girls' education in the Global South as a means to solving global poverty. Girl Up has been critiqued for encouraging Southern girls to take individual responsibility for lifting their communities out of poverty, for depoliticising global and gender inequalities and for encouraging girls in the Global North to see themselves as the saviours of their Southern counterparts. However, there has been little research on how girls participate in campaigns such as Girl Up. My central research question asks how girls negotiate girl power discourses in the Girl Up campaign. I adopt a feminist, postcolonial and poststructuralist theoretical approach in analysing data from focus groups with Girl Up members in the UK, US and Malawi. From girls in New York attending women's marches to girls in Lilongwe raising money to keep their friends in school, the Girl Up members adapted the campaign to suit their own visions of empowerment, rejecting simplistic narratives of Northern saviours and Southern victims. They undertook activities of a more radical nature than was advocated by Girl Up, reflected critically on the Girl Up discourse, rejected its individualistic models of girls' empowerment and interacted with their Northern/Southern counterparts in a spirit of mutual learning and respect. I came to conceptualise Girl Up club members as feminist activists, thus contributing to the emerging literature on girls' political activism, which has historically been under theorised in the literature on politics, youth studies and gender and development. I conclude that scholars of development studies and campaigning organisations alike need to pay greater attention to girls as political subjects and to their many moments of resistance to dominant discourses.

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's *Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes* and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: DATE:

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List of Abbreviations

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CAS	“Creativity, Activity, Service” component of the International Baccalaureate
CNN	Cable News Network
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DBS	Disclosure and Barring Service
DT	Design Technology
ESRC	Economic and Social Research Council
EU	European Union
GAD	Gender and Development
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IB	International Baccalaureate
IT	Information Technology
LGBTQ	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Questioning/Queer
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MP	Member of Parliament
MSCE	Malawian Secondary Certificate of Education
PE	Physical Education
RE	Religious Education
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease
STEAM	Science, Technology and Maths
TNC	Transnational Corporation
UCAS	Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN Foundation	United Nations Foundation
US	United States of America
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
UK	United Kingdom.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

This thesis analyses girls' negotiation of girl power discourses in the Girl Up campaign. Girl Up is one of many campaigns that have emerged in recent years with the aim of empowering girls in the Global South through formal schooling. Launched by the UN Foundation in 2010, it encourages girls in the Global North to set up clubs and organise events to raise money for the education of the world's "hardest to reach girls" in the Global South (Girl Up, nd a). As then UN Foundation Executive Director Elizabeth McKee Gore explained at its launch, the purpose of the campaign is to "give girls in America an opportunity to become global leaders themselves, and then in the meantime be supporting their sisters overseas" (Biddle, 2010). In Girl Up, girls in the Global North can develop leadership skills through social media campaigning, attending summits and organising fundraisers in their schools, all to help guarantee Southern girls' access to basic supplies such as textbooks and school uniforms. Just as many similar campaigns have done in recent years, Girl Up claims that the benefits of this endeavour go far beyond girls themselves, as Southern girls will use their education to lift themselves, their families and their entire communities out of poverty. Our world, the campaign claims, is "at a turning point" and girls in the Global North are the ones to "make this change happen" (UN Foundation, 2010b).

The United Nations Foundation, or UN Foundation, was launched in 1997 with a billion-dollar donation from media entrepreneur and CNN founder Robert Edward "Ted" Turner (Utting, 2000: 3). At the time, it was the "largest single donation ever made to any one organisation" (Williams, 1999: 426). However, the UN Charter states that UN funding cannot come from a private individual (Toepler and Mard, 2007: 2; Williams, 1999: 435-6). This predicament led to the creation of the United Nations Foundation, which is a charity registered in the United States and is intended to function independently of the United Nations (Bull, Bøås and McNeill, 2004: 482; Williams, 1999: 437). Turner's donation came at a time when the United Nations had a budgetary deficit of \$272 million, exacerbated by the United States' refusal to pay its membership dues (Williams, 1999: 430).

It was intended to send a message to President Bill Clinton and to the US public. According to the Foundation's first President, Tim Wirth, some of its core priorities from the beginning were to "raise a lot of money" and "[tell] the [UN] story to Americans" (cited in Williams, 1999: 428). The money raised would then fund UN agency programmes according to the UN Foundation priority areas, which were influenced by the Board of Directors, which includes Ted Turner himself. For Turner and his then wife Jane Fonda, an important policy area was "focusing on improving socio-economic and educational opportunities for adolescent girls" (Toepler and Mard, 2007: 3).

The UN Foundation was already involved in one high profile campaign about investing in girls in the Global South, as a partner in the Nike Foundation's "Girl Effect" campaign, which aimed to convince global decision-makers of the urgent need to invest in adolescent girls in the Global South. However, according to a staff member of the Girl Effect in 2011, "tensions around brand ownership" (Kylander, 2011: 7) led to the UN Foundation deciding to launch a new campaign with its own branding. It launched Girl Up in 2010. The campaign now claims to have over 1,900 member clubs, made up of girls in different countries who are fundraising for UN agencies' work on girls' education in six states of the Global South (Girl Up, nd a). When it first launched, the campaign only allowed girls in the US to register clubs, reflecting the priority of the UN Foundation to engage US publics in the work of the UN. Membership is now open to girls anywhere in the world, providing they have access to the internet. However, the resources on the website remain targeted towards girls in the Global North. Queen Rania of Jordan, who has been one of the campaign's 'Global Advocates' from the very start, proudly proclaimed that Girl Up "will give a girl in Missouri the opportunity to help a girl in Malawi buy school supplies" (UN Foundation, 2010a).

The Girl Powering of International Development

Girl Up is just one of many campaigns that have emerged in the past fifteen years as part of what Ofra Koffman and Rosalind Gill label the "girl powering of international development" (2013: 86),

and in many ways it epitomises much about this phenomenon that feminists have critiqued.¹ In recent decades there has been an unprecedented interest in the plight of girls² in the Global South,³ accompanied by calls to intervene in their lives, from international institutions, non-governmental organisations and transnational corporations alike. This interest gained momentum in 2008, when the Nike Foundation, Novo Foundation and UN Foundation partnered to launch the Girl Effect with the aim of influencing international development actors in favour of investing in girls. The Girl Effect

¹ The term “international development” is commonly understood to mean “policies, strategies and interventions supported by foreign assistance and intended to alleviate poverty among countries that are collectively described as the ‘developing world’” (Cairns, Mackay and MacDonald, 2011: 330). Such “foreign assistance” comes from an increasingly broad array of actors, including national governments, international institutions, transnational corporations, civil society organisations, wealthy philanthropists and Northern publics. As a term, it is being rejected by many scholars in favour of “global development,” which many feel moves away from a focus on ‘development’ as only being necessary in the Global South (Horner, 2017: 5). However, I use the term “international development” here precisely to emphasise the top-down, North-South structure of the interventions I am analysing. Consistent with my poststructuralist theoretical framework, I also conceptualise “development” as a particular “cast of mind” or “frame of reference,” which shapes North-South power relations and produces certain kinds of interventions (Sachs, 2007: 1). In doing so, I hope to problematise some of the assumptions inherent in the use of the term, including the assumption that it always “implies a favourable change” (Esteve, 2007: 10; see also Cornwall, 2007: 471).

² The use of the term “girl” in this thesis is a difficult choice. It suggests a younger child and as a result, a lack of agency, while many scholars of youth studies argue that the term “young people” to refer to adolescents in general, and “young woman” for female adolescents, is more respectful (Mazzarella, 2003; Skelton, 2000; Weller, 2006: 104). This would seem more apt in a feminist study challenging patronising or limiting discourses about young women and what they can achieve. I began my fieldwork with the intention of using the term “young woman” at all times. However, I was struck by how little it resonated with my participants, who always referred to themselves as “girls.” I also got the impression that for some of my participants in Lilongwe, where girls were at times taken out of school before the age of 18 to marry, emphasising that someone is still a “girl” is of crucial importance. I have therefore chosen to adopt the same approach to the word as used by Carol Dyhouse (2014: 9): “Reactions to the use of the word ‘girl’ have often depended on who is using it. I have chosen to use it broadly and affirmatively.” My hope is that the manner in which I use the term and the context of this research and its aim of recognising girls as activists, can be seen as an affirmative use of the word. Occasionally, I use the term “young women” when discussing other scholars’ work, to denote that it specifically concerns young adult women.

³ I have chosen to adopt the terminology of Global North and South rather than First and Third World or ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries because it has come to be used in a way that acknowledges the complexity of relations between different locations around the world and the interdependence between them (Rai, 2011: 19). As Eric Sheppard and Richa Nagar argue, “the global North is constituted through a network of political and economic elites spanning privileged localities across the globe. By contrast, the global South – whose population is disproportionately made up of ‘indigenous’ communities, people of colour and women – is to be found everywhere” (2004: 558). Although the terms Global North and South have been critiqued by Chandra Talpade Mohanty as one of many terms that reproduce “misleading geographical and ideological binarisms” (2011: 394), I conceptualise the North and South in the way that many critical scholars do, acknowledging the existence of privilege within what might be considered Southern countries and marginalisation within the North. It is precisely this complicating of geographical binarisms that allows me to conceptualise the girls from an international school in Lilongwe who participated in this study as belonging to the Global North, as discussed in Chapter 4.

launched with a series of videos – produced by Nike marketing staff (Kylander, 2011) – which claimed that the “unexpected solution” to issues ranging from poverty and hunger to HIV was the “girl” (Girl Effect, nd). It argues that when a girl in the Global South is given an education or a loan to start a business, she will work hard, provide for her family, marry later and have fewer, healthier children and in so doing, improve the economy of her whole country. If this investment was given to every girl in the Global South, the Girl Effect claims, “you’ve just changed the course of history” (nd). The logic of the Girl Effect is epitomised by the tag line to one of its first promotional videos: “Invest in a girl and she will do the rest” (nd). This logic, which posits girls as the world’s greatest “untapped resource,” has rapidly achieved influence over the highest levels of development policy (Chant, 2016a: 5; Koffman and Gill 2013: 86), garnering support and funds from transnational corporations such as Coca Cola, Exxon, Goldman Sachs and Gucci; the United Nations and departments of its member governments, including USAID and the UK Department for International Development; and charitable foundations set up by philanthropists (Calkin, 2015a: 300; Hickel, 2014: 1362; Kylander, 2011: 6; Moeller, 2013: 615). Development policy has come to target girls, both as Northern donors and as Southern recipients of aid.

Feminists’ critiques of this logic can be grouped around two main themes, the first of which is the simplistic and individualistic solution to complex problems that it advocates.⁴ For many it is a continuation of previous instrumentalist approaches to gender in international development, which see the rights of women and girls in the Global South not as a goal in themselves but rather as a means to achieving other development outcomes (Chant and Sweetman, 2012: 521; Hickel, 2014: 1362; Wallace and Porter, 2013). The campaigns resonate strongly with neoliberal discourses that have taken the feminist concept of empowerment and “economised” it (Shain, 2013: 3.9), reducing calls for gender justice to a focus on providing education as a means to gaining work-based skills

⁴ The following two paragraphs summarising feminists’ critiques of the girl powering of development have previously been published in an article I wrote about the findings of this thesis in *Gender and Development* (Walters, 2018: 480-481).

(Banet-Weiser, 2015: 183; Calkin, 2015a: 300; Hayhurst, 2014: 304; Khoja-Moolji, 2015a). Where other interventions are proposed they are based on an individualistic, neoliberal view that providing a girl in the Global South with a loan to buy a cow (Girl Effect, nd) or a sewing machine (UN Foundation, 2010b) will solve her problems. This places the responsibility to lift herself out of poverty firmly on the shoulders of an adolescent girl (Chawansky, 2012: 474; Hickel, 2014: 1356). It is difficult to imagine any organisation advocating giving a girl in the Global North a sewing machine as a solution to her struggle with poverty, lack of education and the risk of sexual exploitation. Furthermore, the assertion that a school education or a loan to buy a cow will unleash the incredible potential of the Southern girl ignores the complexity of the injustices faced by girls everywhere and the socioeconomic factors that mean they might not overcome them (Calkin, 2015c: 665; Cobbett, 2014: 310-1).

The second criticism focuses on the way that campaigns such as The Girl Effect and Girl Up construct the Global North as a well-meaning benefactor of the Global South. In Girl Up, Northern girls are encouraged to see themselves as always already empowered, with spectacular talents (Bent, 2016) and nothing holding them back. By contrast, the Southern girl is seen as constrained by outdated gender norms that only Northern intervention will help to break down (Calkin, 2015c: 657; Switzer, 2013: 355). The construction of the Northern girl as agentic is dependent on the construction of the Southern girl as victim. This leaves no space for Southern girls to claim agency within their own lives, nor for Northern girls to also be the victims of patriarchal norms (Bent and Switzer, 2016: 123). The construction of benevolent Northern saviours also masks the inequalities within the global economy that disadvantage Southern economies (Chant and Sweetman, 2012: 526). This is most evident in the sponsorship of such campaigns by transnational corporations whose business activities in the Global South can be extractive or harmful (Prügl, 2016). Examples include the Nike Foundation's central role in The Girl Effect, despite previous claims of child labour at sweatshops producing Nike clothes in the Global South (Calkin, 2015c: 664), and the partnership between Girl Up and Caterpillar, whose selling of military construction equipment to the Israeli

Defence Forces was criticised in 2012 by the UN Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories as violating international human rights and humanitarian law (United Nations, 2012). Campaigns such as The Girl Effect and Girl Up are based on a logic that “works to explicitly racialise, depoliticise, ahistoricise and naturalise global structural inequities and legitimise neoliberal interventions in the name of girls’ empowerment” (Switzer, 2013: 347).

Research Questions

One area that has so far been undertheorised in the literature, however, is how girls themselves negotiate discourses about the need to invest in girls’ education. Building on the small number of studies critiquing Girl Up specifically (see Koffman and Gill, 2013; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015) and the broader literature on the girl powering of development, this thesis analyses girls’ participation in the Girl Up campaign and their negotiation of the Girl Up discourse. From the beginning of the study, my two central research questions have been:

- What is the Girl Up discourse?
- How do Girl Up club members in the Global North and South negotiate the Girl Up discourse?

In answering these questions, I adopt a feminist, postcolonial theoretical framework and I use poststructuralist discourse analysis. I conducted an analysis of official Girl Up promotional materials in order to identify the Girl Up discourse. I then conducted focus groups with Girl Up club members in the UK, US and Malawi in order to analyse both their reading of the Girl Up discourse and, more broadly, their participation in the campaign.

The second of my research questions is very complex, covering girls’ participation in the campaign and their reading of the discourse itself. Through the course of the fieldwork, I came to identify five sub-questions within that second research question, which now form the basis of the structure of this thesis. Chapters 6-10 therefore answer the following sub-questions in the same

order that they are presented in here. Having identified the Girl Up discourse through my own analysis of Girl Up materials, the first sub-question about girls' negotiation of it was then:

- What are girls' readings of the Girl Up discourse in Girl Up marketing materials?

Secondly, although the girls were actively participating in a campaign that has been critiqued for perpetuating postfeminist⁵ discourses about girls (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015; see also Switzer, 2013: 347), I came to conceptualise them as feminist activists. A further research question thus became:

- How, as feminist activists, do they negotiate participating in a campaign that frequently produces and reproduces neoliberal, postfeminist discourses about girls?

Thirdly, I wanted to analyse girls' negotiation of the individualistic vision of girls' empowerment in the Girl Up discourse – something which emerged as an important focus from my analysis of Girl Up materials and has been identified by feminist scholars in wider girl power discourses in development. Two further questions are:

- How do girls in the Global South negotiate instrumentalist discourses in Girl Up, which position them as responsible for lifting their communities out of poverty all by themselves?
- How do girls in the Global North negotiate spectacular discourses in Girl Up (Bent, 2016; Projansky, 2014), which position them as capable of saving the world all by themselves?

Finally, I was able during my fieldwork to establish links between some of the Girl Up clubs in the Global North and South. This raised a fifth sub-question for the research:

- How do Girl Up club members negotiate “oppositional” discourses of girlhood in the Global North and South (Bent and Switzer, 2016) and how do they interact with one another across that divide?

⁵ This reproduction of postfeminist discourses in the girl powering of development is discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In answering these questions, this thesis makes an empirical contribution to the literature on the girl powering of development, both in its focus on a campaign that has previously received little attention and in its focus on girls' participation in that campaign. It also makes a theoretical contribution by demonstrating the agency that girls show in negotiating powerful discourses.

Outline of the Thesis

In the next chapter, I review the literature on the "girl powering" of development. I start by drawing on the extensive literature on gender and development to argue that recent campaigns' instrumentalist rationale for investing in girls is not particularly new, but rather a continuation of the "efficiency" approaches to women and development that have come before. I then review the excellent critiques by postcolonial scholars of discursive constructions of race and gender in international development campaigns, which inform my analysis of the Girl Up discourse. In the final two sections, I turn to the issues of girls, feminism, activism and agency. A central argument here is that the literature on postfeminism in the Global North is pessimistic in tone, despite evidence that young women are not abandoning feminist politics. Linked to this, I argue that girls' activism has been under theorised in the literature on youth studies and political activism but with this thesis, I aim to contribute to a small, emerging literature on girls' activism in the fields of girlhood studies and development studies.

In Chapter 3, I outline my theoretical framework for this study, which is feminist, postcolonial and poststructuralist. I argue that my conceptualisation of the girls as activists is consistent with my theoretical framework and offers insights into how the girls negotiate participating in a girl power campaign in international development. I also outline my conceptualisation of the negotiation of discourse, drawing on the work of cultural scholars such as Stuart Hall and of feminist audience reception scholars. Finally, I identify various concepts in the literature on the girl powering of development that I draw on in analysing the Girl Up discourse,

including the construction of “oppositional girlhoods” (Bent and Switzer, 2016) and the spectacularisation of girlhood (Projansky, 2014; Bent, 2016).

In Chapter 4, I discuss my use of poststructuralist discourse analysis and my methods of data collection. In identifying the Girl Up discourse, I collected publications, videos and emails from Girl Up. In analysing girls’ negotiation of these discourses, I used focus groups as a method both to gather research data on the girls’ co-construction of meaning through their conversations and to gather information about their activities as part of Girl Up. I explore the many difficulties I encountered in contacting Girl Up clubs and the many practical decisions I made in designing the focus groups. I also outline the techniques I have used in presenting and analysing the focus group data, which allow me to analyse the interactions between members as well as their words, helping to show how meaning is negotiated within a group of girls. I also discuss the concept of reading the data “against the grain” (Khoja-Moolji, 2016: 753), which seeks to identify that which does not fit with a dominant discourse. I argue that while it would be possible to write an entire thesis about how girls reproduce the Girl Up discourse, by “reading against the grain” I have identified the complexities and contradictions of the many ways in which they do not. Finally, I outline the various steps I took to try to adopt a heightened concern for research ethics, as consistent with a feminist methodology.

In Chapter 5, I identify the “Girl Up discourse” by analysing materials available on the Girl Up website and sent out in Girl Up fundraising emails. In doing so, I conduct a much more detailed analysis of the Girl Up campaign than has been done before. I argue that the Girl Up discourse reproduces individualistic and instrumentalist discourses about girls in the Global South, placing the responsibility on their shoulders for solving global poverty. Furthermore, it reproduces individualistic, spectacular discourses of girlhood in the Global North by constructing Northern girls as capable of saving the world. In both cases, it gives girls the responsibility for solving problems that should not be theirs to solve (Chawansky, 2014: 474). Furthermore, the discursive

constructions of Northern and Southern girlhood are so different as to be “oppositional” (Bent and Switzer, 2016), dividing the world into countries where girls supposedly have every opportunity available to them and countries where girls passively await rescue. However, I then deviate from the existing literature by including a section in which I look for the examples in Girl Up promotional materials that evade the dominant discourse. When staff at Girl Up make space on the campaign’s website for girls’ own opinions, the Girl Up discourse comes to incorporate more radical and feminist information than it usually would. Even within official Girl Up materials, then, girls’ own perspectives disrupt dominant development discourses.

Chapters 6-10 explore girls’ negotiation of Girl Up. Chapter 6 focuses on their readings of Girl Up marketing materials that I showed them during focus groups. I start by analysing the instances where the girls took pleasure in the Girl Up discourse and its girl power messages, before considering how they adapt the Girl Up discourse to their own context and sometimes challenged representations in the materials they saw. I argue that the girls almost never adopted an entirely dominant reading of the Girl Up discourse, instead showing great capacity for critical analysis and rejecting some of its supposedly common-sense claims.

Chapter 7 analyses the girls’ activities as part of Girl Up club, arguing that they constitute a form of feminist activism. From raising awareness of gender inequality in their own communities, to creating a “safe space” for girls to discuss their experiences of sexism, resisting hostile attitudes towards feminism in their schools and attending political rallies together, girls’ participation in Girl Up frequently subverted the Girl Up discourse.

In Chapters 8 and 9, I analyse two related but different individualistic discourses: instrumentalism and spectacularisation. In Chapter 8, I explore Southern girls’ negotiation of instrumentalist discourses in Girl Up. Although the girls frequently reproduced essentialist discourses that place greater responsibilities on the shoulders of girls than of their male peers, they also emphasised the need for a collective struggle by girls to look after each other’s health and

wellbeing, to support one another to achieve what they want to with their lives and to create a better society for girls. This contradiction, I argue, is epitomised by the words of one girl in Lilongwe, who declared that as girls, “we stand on our own.” I argue, therefore, that while the girls did want to work hard to support their families and communities, they did not simply see this as a question of taking greater responsibility on themselves without wider structural change. Rather, they talked about their feminist aims of taking power out of the hands of men and using it to improve the lives of women.

In Chapter 9, I explore Northern girls’ negotiation of spectacular discourses that see individual girls as capable of changing the world entirely on their own, regardless of socioeconomic circumstances and without the support of their wider communities. Although some of the girls in the US and UK did emphasise that their participation in Girl Up was driven by a feeling that they had a particular talent that they could use to make a difference, this was not articulated in a way that suggested they could improve the situation for girls around the world by themselves. Furthermore, many of the girls were self-deprecating, emphasising the limitations of what their Girl Up clubs could achieve. They were also eager to discuss the many barriers that they faced in their activism because of their marginalised position in society and within school hierarchies and to highlight where supportive adults were helping to make their activism possible. I conclude, therefore, that they have not fully embraced spectacular discourses, which serve to hide the support that girls need in order to make change happen. Just as the girls in Lilongwe emphasised a collective struggle to change their society, the UK and US girls also countered individualistic discourses by emphasising their need for support in their activism.

Chapter 10 explores one discourse that the girls in the Global North did initially reproduce uncritically: the portrayal of girlhood in the Global North and South as opposing subject positions. While girls in the Global North did challenge the representation in Girl Up materials of the North as a place of privilege and of gender equality, they did not question the assumption within that discourse

that it is vastly preferential to the Global South. They reproduced patronising discourses about Southern girlhood as characterised by victimhood, poverty and disease. I argue that the girls did not have contextual information available to them to critically reflect on the portrayal of the South, which resonates deeply with historical representations in international development campaigns. However, tracing a progression throughout the research project, I show that through learning about their peers in other locations, meeting one another in person or via Skype and even setting up a long-term partnership between two clubs, the Northern girls began to negotiate the discourse of oppositional girlhoods too. Where they had initially seen connecting across the discursive North-South divide as impossible, the girls came to interact with one another in an atmosphere of mutual learning and respect. I argue, then, that even this seemingly most dominant discourse in the girl powering of development can easily be disrupted.

In the final chapter, I outline my conclusions and discuss some of the implications and limitations of the research. Overall, I argue that the findings of this thesis demonstrate a need for greater recognition in feminist, poststructuralist research of girls' agency in negotiating powerful discourses. Without denying that such discourses do have power, nor that they are problematic, it is possible to explore how girls adapt and sometimes outright reject them in order to find their own vision of girls' empowerment. While it would be possible with this data to write an entire thesis about girls' reproduction of dominant, neoliberal discourses, and to do so might fit with current trends in development studies and girlhood studies, this would only be telling half of the story.

Chapter 2 – Girls, Agency and Development Discourses

There is a vibrant literature critiquing the phenomenon that Koffman and Gill label “the girl powering of international development” (2013: 86), in which international institutions, national governments, non-governmental organisations and transnational corporations have embraced girl power discourses about the supposed rewards to be gained from investing in girls in the Global South. The phenomenon has been followed closely by feminist scholars of development studies, International Political Economy and of the recently emerging interdisciplinary field of girlhood studies. The latter brings together scholars of politics, sociology and cultural studies, amongst other disciplines, in analysing how girlhood is “constituted through multiple and frequently competing discourses, which position girls in different ways, and are shaped by class and ‘race’ as well as gender and sexuality” (Griffin, 2004: 32). The literature on the girl powering of development draws on, and expands, the vast literatures on feminists’ efforts in mainstreaming gender into development policy, discursive constructions of gender and race in development and postfeminist discourses about women in the Global North. However, there is one topic on which the literature has so far remained silent: girls’ agency in negotiating girl power discourses in development. This reflects a wider neglect of the topic of girls’ activism and engagement with politics (Taft, 2011: 4). This study thus contributes to a small emerging literature that begins to explore young women’s challenges to development thinking.

In the first section of this chapter, I discuss the literature on feminisms, gender and development. A central theme here is that despite the so-called “waves” of development policy concerning women and girls, its underlying assumptions and logic have hardly changed in decades. Development has consistently adopted an instrumentalist rationale for gender policies, seeing investment in programmes for women and girls as worth doing only because of the supposed benefits that they will bring in achieving other development goals. It relies upon an economised vision of girls’ and women’s empowerment that focuses strongly on basic education and waged

labour. A particular strength of the literature on the girl powering of development is in showing how it reproduces these instrumentalist discourses.

In the second section, I go on to discuss postcolonial feminists' critiques of representations of the 'Southern woman.' Responding to critiques of the abundance of images of disaster and helplessness in development depictions of the Global South, many organisations now favour supposedly more positive images of happy, empowered girls and women with the ability to change the world. However, scholars have noted that even these more positive images are only portrayed as possible thanks to the intervention of a generous Northern donor, thus perpetuating discourses of the 'Southern woman' awaiting rescue. Here again, the literature on the girl powering of development, with its critique of the representation of the 'Southern girl,' reveals how this supposedly new phenomenon can be conceptualised as a continuation of what has gone before.

In the third section, I review the literature on neoliberalism and postfeminism in the Global North. There has been a wealth of studies in the past two decades on the domination in the Global North of neoliberal discourses of individual freedom and choice, which ultimately reject feminist conceptualisations of structural gender inequalities. Empirical studies with girls and young women even claim to show a reduction in identification with the feminist movement and a difficulty in naming patriarchy as a factor in their own lives. I then discuss claims by those scholars who argue that this literature is too pessimistic in tone, countering with empirical evidence of their own to suggest that support for feminism amongst girls has not waned.

In the final section of this chapter, I build on this argument to consider girls' resistance to powerful discourses. I argue that scholars have paid too little attention to girls' agency in negotiating them. In contrast to the wealth of studies on girls' rejection of feminism or their reproduction of postfeminist discourses, there is a small, newly emerging literature about girls' resistance to them. A recent issue of the journal *Gender and Development* entitled "Young Feminisms," which featured an article based on the findings of this thesis (Walters, 2018), is an

important development in this regard. It explores the many different forms of young feminists' activism and how they are countering instrumentalist discourses in development. I argue, therefore, that this thesis makes an important contribution to this small body of literature in development studies and more broadly to theorisations of girls' agency in feminist poststructuralist work by highlighting how girls are able to negotiate, adapt or even strategically use girl power discourses.

Feminisms, Gender and International Development

Feminist scholars and practitioners of development have done important work in exposing the gender bias and gender blindness behind many policy initiatives and institutions. According to one practitioner, to date less than ten percent of development spending has been directed towards women and girls (Rosche, 2016: 122), while other scholars have shown how the money that has been spent has impacted very differently on men and women, with a disproportionately negative impact on women (e.g. Momsen, 2004: 16). While critical scholars have argued that the structure of the global economy is such that poverty and economic stagnation in the former colonies will be reproduced indefinitely (e.g. Cardoso, 2015; Frank, 2015: 109; Hoogvelt, 2001: 38), feminist scholars have built on this critique to argue that economic processes of development can actually serve to "exploit, even create, particular hierarchies of labour, class, gender and sexual relations" (Griffin, 2007: 730; see also Bidegain Ponte and Rodriguez Enriquez, 2016: 89; Enloe, 2014). While generations of feminist activism have succeeded in bringing gender inequalities to the attention of development institutions, with gender featuring in various guises or "waves" in development policy, scholars have demonstrated how feminist concepts such as "empowerment" have consistently been co-opted into the development project, with girls' and women's rights rarely featuring as a priority in their own right. In the following paragraphs, I review feminists' critiques of development policies concerning gender, including their critiques of the gendered concepts and assumptions that underpin them. I then go on to review scholars' recent work in charting the reproduction of instrumentalist discourses in the "girl powering" of development.

Despite the many incarnations of feminist approaches to development, including the so-called “waves” of Women in Development (WID) and Gender and Development (GAD), feminist scholars have demonstrated the consistency in development discourse of an instrumentalist logic for investing in women and girls that focuses on the supposed benefits of doing so towards achieving other development outcomes (Momsen, 2004: 14; see also Mbilizi, 2013: 150). WID advocates in the 1970s and 1980s were largely associated with a liberal feminist approach to development policy that did not challenge the overall power structures and policy frameworks, but rather demanded a more equal participation of women within them (Roberts, 2015: 212). This approach relied on a “win-win” narrative that the inclusion of women in the development process would both “benefit women and promote more efficiency” (Calkin, 2015a: 297). While many feminist scholars and practitioners have since distanced themselves from the WID approach, it is important to stress that WID advocates succeeded in doing what had not been done before: getting women onto the development agenda. By contrast, the much more radical agenda that emerged from the Fourth World Women’s Conference in Beijing in 1995, known as Gender and Development, grew out of postcolonial and socialist politics and sought to analyse the “interlinked nature of gender inequality and processes of capitalist restructuring” (Ferguson, 2011: 240; see also Eyben, 2006: 600; Kabeer, 2015: 380). GAD’s focus was very much on gender equality as a matter of social justice, rather than as a tool to achieving broader development goals.

However, feminists have argued that GAD’s radical agenda was lost. At the same time that GAD was emerging, discussions were under way that would culminate in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which would shape development policy for years to come (Kabeer, 2015: 382). Criticised by feminists as a “donor-driven” (Esquivel and Sweetman, 2016: 30), “North-South” (Fukuda-Parr, 2016: 44) agenda, which ignored the voices of women (Gabizon, 2016) and represented the “lowest common denominator” (Razavi 2016: 26) in gender and development policy, the MDGs equated gender equality with simplistic targets for equal enrolment in primary school and a reduction in maternal mortality. They were based on the instrumentalist “theory of

change” that stressed that achieving gender parity in education would ultimately result in gender equality (Razavi, 2016: 29). While the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the replacement to the MDGs, launched in 2015 – at least involved some consultation with women’s groups (Esquivel and Sweetman, 2016: 3) and are seen as an attempt at mainstreaming gender in development policy (Koehler, 2016: 74), feminists have also pointed to the new goals’ limitations (Esquivel, 2016: 12; Esquivel and Sweetman, 2016: 4; Gabizon, 2016: 107; Razavi, 2016: 31; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016: 78). In particular, the language and framing of the SDGs, with their promise that “realising gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls will make a crucial contribution to progress across all the Goals and targets” (United Nations General Assembly, 2015: 6), still advocate promoting women’s education and economic participation because of the other goals that this will help to achieve (Esquivel, 2016). Gender and development scholars have charted a resurgence in recent years of this instrumentalist approach that constructs investing in women as “efficient” (e.g. Eyben, 2010). Sydney Calkin laments the rise of “femocrats” who have striven to “reconceptualise girls and women as misallocated capital” in order to sell gender policies, and their own gender expertise, to policy makers (2015b: 6; see also Kunz and Prügl, 2019; Kunz, Prügl and Thompson, 2019; Miller, 2019). Sylvia Chant and Caroline Sweetman argue that soundbites on the “smart economics” of investing in women and girls have “become ubiquitous” (2012: 518). Indeed, the many criticisms of the instrumentalist language in the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals demonstrate that despite the GAD agenda’s challenge to development, liberal efficiency approaches never really went away (Chant, 2016a: 3; Chant, 2016b: 319; Fukuda-Parr, 2016; Koehler, 2016).

Central to the critique of instrumentalism in the literature is an analysis of the conceptualisation of women’s and girls’ “empowerment” that underpins it (Kabeer, 1999). The work of Naila Kabeer has been particularly influential in this regard. She problematises the automatic linking between girls’ education and women’s employment in waged work with women’s empowerment, arguing for example that there is an important difference between a woman gaining

employment as a result of a new opportunity or in order to become more independent of her male kin and a woman engaging in a “distress sale” of her labour because of extreme poverty (2005: 15). Furthermore, some gender inequalities – such as the unfair distribution of domestic and care work – remain unaltered by policies promoting women’s economic employment, while promoting girls’ participation in the gendered hierarchy of the school system may actually serve to reproduce some inequalities (ibid: 17-20; Fonseka, 2018: 571).

Feminist scholars have applied this critique of instrumentalism and of the narrow conceptualisation of empowerment underpinning it to the “girl powering of international development,” which Koffman and Gill identify as the latest “wave” in development policy concerning girls and women (2013: 86). Campaigns such as the Girl Effect, Girl Up, Girl Rising and Plan International’s Because I Am A Girl – amongst others – emphasise the supposed benefits to everybody else for investing in girls: the boost to a country’s economy resulting from their participation in the workforce; the promise of delayed childrearing, reduced fertility and healthier, better educated children in the future; and the claim that educated girls will break down gender barriers in other areas of society (Bent, 2013a: 5).

Farzana Shain argues that the campaigns have taken the feminist concept of “empowerment” and “economised” it (2013: 3.9), so that an education in order to gain workplace skills, a loan to start a business or participation in waged labour come to represent “empowerment” for girls and women in the Global South. Mirroring Kabeer’s argument that a choice made with no alternatives cannot really said to be a choice (2005: 13), Koffman and Gill critique the emphasis on the Southern girl’s ability to lift herself out of poverty, in which “even a struggle with extreme poverty can be cast in terms of empowerment” (2013: 90; see also Wilson, 2010: 304). It is a vision of empowerment that is delinked from politics, community and collective organising and focuses instead on the individual (Hauge and Bryson, 2014: 302). The onus is on girls themselves to change their behaviour, to use investments wisely and to turn entire communities around. Women and girls

are given the responsibility for solving problems (world poverty) they were not responsible for causing and that will ultimately require the cooperation of men and boys if they are to succeed (Chant, 2016a: 5; Chant, 2016b: 316; Hayhurst et al., 2014: 161; Hickel, 2014: 1356). The slippage in the campaigns between education and girls' empowerment (Cobbett, 2014: 312; Khoja-Moolji, 2015a; Switzer, 2013: 346-7) has been critiqued for ignoring the barriers that girls face outside of school, assuming that the education they receive will be equal and equally accessible for them as it is for boys and ignoring the many other gender injustices that girls and women face (Fredman, Kuosmanen and Campbell, 2016; Pogge and Sengupta, 2016: 89; Rosche, 2016: 113); "while girls' education garners concerted attention, it has been limited to an instrumental concern with rights to education rather than substantive rights *in or through* education" (Switzer, Bent and Endsley, 2016: 34). In summary then, the literature critiques the campaigns' tendency to "supply easy solutions to complex problems and position girls as the solutions to problems for which they are not (ultimately) responsible" (Chawansky, 2012: 474).

Feminist critiques of the girl powering of development have highlighted the ways in which these campaigns and the resulting pressure on girls to make the right "choices" could be seen as anything but empowering. As Kathryn Moeller writes, reflecting on her ethnography of a Girl Effect-funded project in Brazil, "the Girl Effect is not what one would ask of her or his own child," because it "asks them to be responsible for the lives, well-being and futures of those far beyond themselves, including their families, their communities, their nations and the world" (2014: 599). Furthermore, the positing of adolescent girls as untapped resources waiting to be unleashed upon the market constructs those girls and women who made the supposedly 'wrong' choices as adolescents as inactive in their families, communities and the wider economy. While this argument may be popular with powerful development institutions (Calkin, 2015b), scholars have pointed out that to women who are already contributing significantly through their productive, domestic and reproductive labour, it is both patronising and inaccurate (Chant and Sweetman, 2012: 523; Roberts, 2012: 95).

Furthermore, feminists have demonstrated how the strong emphasis in the campaigns on the necessity for girls to remain sexually abstinent and child-free during their adolescence in order to complete their education and become economically productive resonates with conservative discourses, and panic, about girls' sexuality in the Global North (Gannon et al., 2012; Renold and Ringrose, 2011: 389-90; Shields Dobson and Harris, 2015: 144). The idea of a child-free adolescence is central to campaigns such as The Girl Effect, Girl Up and Plan International's Because I Am A Girl (Calkin, 2015b: 13; Koffman and Gill, 2013: 88; Switzer, 2013: 349). As Heather Switzer writes, "the narrative relies on false dichotomies of the durable sexual object (embodied in the schoolgirl) and the disposable sexual subject (embodied in the pregnant child-bride) that empty girl subjects of agency" (2013: 347). Ethnographic studies have highlighted the centrality of this theme in Girl Effect-funded programmes, for example in Lyndsay Hayhurst's study of a youth project in Uganda that was training girls in martial arts so that they could fend off sexual harassment and assault from men and boys (2013: 7.3; 2014). Similarly, Kathryn Moeller conducted ethnographic research with various Girl Effect grantee projects in Latin America and documented how the girls were asked to complete in-depth questionnaires – which would not be deemed appropriate in the Global North – at the beginning and end of the programme about subjects such as "which forms of sex they have engaged in, including vaginal, oral and anal sex, the age of first sexual experience, contraception use and relationship and marital status" (2013: 617). This intimate knowledge about the girls' lives was needed to prove that education alone would prevent the girls from engaging in relationships with boys, thus protecting them from early marriage and motherhood and enabling them to become economically 'empowered' adult women. Moeller argues that this discourse ignores the fact that many girls do not get to decide when to first engage in sex or when to marry, that given adequate access to sexual and reproductive healthcare it is possible for adolescents to have sexual relations and not become pregnant and that girls who have had children are by no means incapable of completing their education (ibid). Girl power discourses in development place responsibility on girls to manage their bodies and remain abstinent in order to complete their education. Paradoxically,

however, Heather Switzer found in her research with Maasai schoolgirls in Kenya that these discourses of responsabilisation actually pushed some girls into exploitative sexual relationships with boys or men in order to secure school fees and avoid being seen to drop out of their education (Switzer, Bent and Endsley, 2016: 44).

Feminist scholars and practitioners have been key to deconstructing the assumptions underpinning the girl powering of development, showing how they resonate with the consistent co-optation of feminist concepts such as “empowerment” into instrumentalist discourses that do not centre girls’ rights and instead place great responsibilities on their shoulders. They have argued that we must ask of development programmes “whether the goal of female investment is primarily to promote gender equality and women’s ‘empowerment,’ or to facilitate development ‘on the cheap’” (Chant and Sweetman, 2012: 521).

Postcolonial Critiques of Discursive Constructions of ‘Race’ and Gender in Development Discourses

Postcolonial scholars have not only critiqued discursive constructions of ‘race’ and gender in development discourses, but they have also demonstrated what is at stake in how the peoples of the Global South are portrayed in development. In recent years, feminist scholars have also applied this critique to the “girl powering” of development, in order to show what is at stake in depicting girls in the Global South as awaiting investment from the North.

Since the first campaigns were launched to raise public awareness about, and funds to supposedly solve, issues such as poverty, disaster, disease and war in former colonies, postcolonial scholars have brought attention to the reproduction of colonial discourses about the Global South and problematised the power relations inherent within them. Arturo Escobar sums up this critique, arguing that there exists in development a portrayal of countries of the Global South as having

features such as powerlessness, passivity, poverty and ignorance, usually dark and lacking in historical agency [...] and not infrequently hungry, illiterate, needy and oppressed by its own stubbornness, lack of initiative and traditions [...] Only from a

certain Western perspective does this description make sense; that it exists at all is more a sign of power over the Third World than a truth about it. (2011: 8-9)

This argument draws heavily on the work of Edward Said, who advanced the theory that the phenomenon of Orientalism in art, literature and scholarly work is “more valuable as a sign of European-Atlantic power over the Orient than it is as a veridic discourse about the Orient” (1979: 6). Said argued that Western domination of the Orient made Orientalism possible and, in turn, Orientalist depictions of Eastern societies as barbaric, lazy, irrational and so on, made Western domination of, and expansion into, the Orient possible. More recent postcolonial work demonstrates how colonial discourses about the Global South, and especially about the African continent, are still visible in development today. These include the portrayal of Africa as a “dark continent, savage, backward and dangerous” (Repo and Yrjölä, 2011: 46); the portrayal of Southern societies as “stagnant” or in decline (Wilson, 2011: 316); and the persistence of atavism, “the belief that the ‘primitive’ people of Africa constituted an earlier stage of human development” (Young, 2000: 268). After decolonisation, these discourses left an enduring legacy in the public imagination, one which means that today, “any campaign that focuses on [Africa] will encounter great difficulty escaping tropes of charity, disaster and salvation” (Harrison, 2010: 408). By contrast, in development imagery the Northerner is the “white saviour offering a charitable hand to ‘helpless’ Africa, child-like in its stage of development” (Wehbi and Taylor, 2012: 526). This, postcolonial scholars argue, tells us a great deal more about the Northerner’s self-perceptions than it does about the Global South. As author Uzodinma Iweala argues, in development imagery, “Africans are the props in the West’s fantasy of itself” (cited in Cameron and Haanstra, 2008: 1482).

Such depictions are never gender neutral and an important endeavour of feminist postcolonial scholars has been to demonstrate the gendered nature of development campaigns. More broadly, postcolonial scholars such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty have argued that white, Western feminism adopts an air of “paternalism” in its calls to rescue women of the Global South (2006: 16). Development campaigns have similarly been accused of reproducing “paternalistic

tropes” of rescue towards girls and women in the South (Calkin, 2015c: 654-5). They appeal to Northern viewers – both male and female – as father-like figures of the Southern woman. Nandita Dogra argues that in order for a campaign video or image to establish the Northern viewer as a paternalistic benefactor of the helpless African, it must first encourage the assumption that the Southern man is incapable of assuming this role himself or may even be part of the problem (2011: 338). Feminists have pointed to the predominance of images of women and children in development campaigns and promotional materials, with the Southern man either absent altogether, or present in the role of militant, abuser or ineffectual leader. Dogra continues,

the vulnerability of Third World women is enhanced by either de-linking them from Third World men (and the familial support they provide, like men across the world), who are not shown at all, or by attributing their vulnerability to Third World men who, in such cases, are demonised as ‘bad’ and/or ‘irresponsible.’ (2011: 339)

She argues that the underlying assumption in this discourse is that the Northerner knows how to rescue the Southern woman and will do so out of her or his generosity and sense of responsibility.

In recent years, however, some development organisations have heeded these criticisms of their representational practices, embracing a shift towards showing “positive images” of the Global South (Desai, 2016: 252). Scholars have charted a conscious shift in representations towards showing Southern people as “happy and empowered” (Cameron and Haanstra, 2008: 1485), as “contented and productive” (Wilson, 2010: 306) and as “self-sufficient, dignified, empowered, active agents” (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 158). The girl powering of development can very much be seen as a symptom of this shift, with its feel-good portrayals of the Southern girl as intelligent, self-sufficient and capable of saving the world. However, feminist scholarship has been critical in demonstrating how the Southern girl is portrayed as only taking on all of these qualities as a result of intervention by the Northern donor-spectator (Calkin, 2015c: 657; Switzer, 2013: 355). Here again, the strength of the scholarship on this topic is in showing how supposedly new phenomena resonate strongly with what has gone before. In this case, in order to depict the Southern girl as having capabilities just waiting to be unleashed by the North, girl power campaigns must first depict her as

powerless and vulnerable. These campaigns therefore represent a hybrid of development discourses, in which the Southern girl is simultaneously helpless, vulnerable and voiceless, and strong, capable and powerful (Shain, 2013: 4.10); she is both “in danger and a global saving grace” (Desai, 2016: 255).

Girl Up’s depictions of girlhood in the Global North and South are explored in much more depth in Chapter 5, bringing in concepts from recent scholarship about the positioning of Northern and Southern girls in relation to one another, as discussed in the conceptual framework. What is key here, however, is the contribution that feminist scholars have made in demonstrating how much about the “girl powering” of development – from instrumentalist discourses to depictions of the Southern girl or woman as helpless – is not at all new. In the following sections, I review the literature on another supposedly recent or new phenomenon – postfeminism – and its links to girl power discourses in development.

Neoliberalism and Postfeminism

A wealth of studies over the past two decades on “postfeminism” and “girl power” argue that in neoliberal, Northern societies, feminism is already seen to have achieved its goals and therefore, whilst being “taken into account,” is “understood as having already passed away” (McRobbie, 2004: 255). Girls are encouraged to see themselves as empowered neoliberal subjects with limitless choices and opportunities before them, but in this individualistic narrative, they are left with nobody but themselves to blame should they make the “wrong” choices (Gill and Scharff, 2013: 7; McRobbie, 2009: 1; Rottenberg, 2014; Thoma, 2009: 412). The literature on postfeminism adopts an overwhelmingly pessimistic tone, charting how the feminist movement’s calls for gender justice and political change have given way to feel-good but empty girl power slogans.

Many feminists have written about the visibility of postfeminist discourses in the media. Angela McRobbie has been central to the development of this literature. She identifies postfeminism as an individualistic discourse that assumes that feminism is no longer needed in

Northern societies and that sees women's success or failure as resulting from individual "choice" (2009: 1). It also includes a rejection, or even vilification, of feminism in popular culture (2009: 1). For McRobbie, postfeminism is a "process by which feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s are actively and relentlessly undermined" (2009: 11). Similarly, for Calkin, while postfeminism may position itself as a "well-intentioned response to feminism," it is in fact a "rejection of feminism" (2015c: 657). While girl power overlaps in many ways with postfeminist discourses (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 159), a crucial component of the phenomenon of girl power is commercialisation, it is "a product located, produced and distributed in a capitalist economy" (Zaslow, 2009: 5; see also Banet-Weiser, 2015). Feminists argue that girl power discourse drew on postfeminist ideas about individual girls' success and freedom to market goods to girls, erasing feminists' continuing concern with inequalities (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013: 191-2). What is being sold is an "affective glow" inspired by "how much positive change has been achieved for women" and complete with "heady, warm-yet-apparently-defiant expressions of admiration for all things girl ('girls rule,' etc)" (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 160). Drawing on neoliberal ideas of freely choosing individuals, girl power adapts, depoliticises and markets feminist struggles and priorities: "girls can consume a (feminist) identity – purchase powerful clothing, buy CDs that contain pro-women lyrics or learn a rhetoric of empowerment, for example – but girl power does not require an investment in social change" (Zaslow, 2009: 6).

Studies with girls and young women frequently argue that they embrace postfeminist discourses of choice when making sense of the discrimination they experience. One finding of such studies is that for young women growing up in post-feminist, neoliberal times, it is difficult to conceptualise themselves as the victims of patriarchy: "subject positions from which to describe experiences of victimhood, oppression, lack, limitation and what we might call 'suffering-marked-by-structure' are not readily available to young women" (Harris and Shields Dobson, 2015: 147-8; see also Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013). One area where this has been documented in empirical research with young women is in the study of sexual consent. Researchers have repeatedly found

that although young women are able to identify harmful norms and practices around masculinity as contributing to rape culture, in relation to their own traumatic experiences they prefer to use a language of choice that suggests that they were in some way to blame for what happened to them (e.g. Bay-Cheng and Eliseo-Arras, 2008: 393; Bay-Cheng et al., 2010; Phillips, 2000: 191). Rosalind Gill argues that in postfeminist, neoliberal times, girls feel as if their narratives of their own lives must position all of their experiences as the result of choices they have made (2008: 441).

Such findings have also been echoed in studies of youth programmes in international development. For example, Chelsey Hauge and Mary K. Bryson (2014) studied interactions between US and Nicaraguan youth in a development programme and found that while the young people were confident in identifying the harmful effects of gender discrimination, neither group identified themselves as suffering its effects. The young people from the US gave examples of gender inequality in Nicaragua and the Nicaraguan young people gave examples of gender inequality experienced by other Nicaraguan young people (Hauge and Bryson, 2014: 301). The implication is that girls are unwilling to use the structural language of feminism to explain harmful experiences that they have faced, instead reproducing postfeminist discourses of individual choice.

Feminist scholars have also charted how girls have come to be embraced as the ideal postfeminist, neoliberal subject: intelligent, hard-working, entrepreneurial and responsible. This trend was initially identified by Anita Harris in her book *Future Girl*, in which she argues that “what it means to prevail or lose out in these new times has become bound up with how we understand girlhood” (2004: 14). She argues that postfeminist discourses of a level playing field for girls and boys, along with stories of girls starting to outperform boys in terms of academic success, have been seized upon to position girls as having the “world at their feet” (ibid: 13). These discourses embrace an individualistic narrative in which girls can achieve great things, greater perhaps than their male peers, but only if they make the “right” choices. However, Harris argues, alongside this supposedly positive vision of girls comes a renewed panic about the “risk” that they might fail to achieve great

things should they make the “wrong” choices, including, for example, early motherhood. Such discourses erase the socioeconomic conditions that make certain choices more or less appealing, or even possible, for girls and instead posit that “good choices, effort and ambition alone are responsible for success” (ibid: 16; see also McRobbie, 2007: 732). This construction serves to regulate girls’ behaviour by encouraging them to embrace the “can-do” persona, while also serving as a constant warning that they are also “at-risk” and leaving them with nobody but themselves to blame should they succumb to that risk (ibid). The girl powering of international development can be seen as an internationalisation of these discourses, in which girls in the Global South come to embody the ultimate at-risk girls, with the can-do potential to solve world poverty (Valdivia, 2018: 85).

Not all scholars believe the pessimism in the literature on postfeminism is justified and that girls have really abandoned feminist activism (see Gill, 2016). Elaine Hall and Marnie Salupo Rodriguez (2003: 879) find no evidence for a decrease in support for feminism amongst women, nor for an increase in women feeling reluctant to identify with the label of feminist. While there is certainly a level of hostility to feminism in the media, this is another phenomenon that can hardly be labelled as new and the media has always negatively stereotyped feminists (Dyhouse, 2014: 209). As far as girls’ willingness to blame patriarchal norms for their own suffering is concerned, it has also never been particularly desirable to portray oneself as a helpless victim of circumstances out of one’s control. This is especially true for girls, whose constant association with helplessness and victimhood justifies all manner of conservative interventions in their lives. As Carol Dyhouse argues, “It is difficult to forge a political identity out of victimhood. Victims call for protection, and too much protection can easily begin to look like control” (2014: 253).

Recently, some feminist scholars have begun to challenge the concept of postfeminism in their work with girls themselves, by demonstrating the ways that girls are engaging in feminist activism (e.g. Bent, 2013b; Taft, 2017; Taft, 2014) or by showing how girls negotiate postfeminist

discourses in the media and in celebrity discourse with “a great deal of wit and sensitivity” (Keller and Ringrose, 2015: 134). Indeed, Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose argue that

the overwhelmingly bleak picture and melancholic tone of [Angela McRobbie’s] accounts [of postfeminism] does not resonate with the ways some tween and teenage girls in our empirical research were subverting, undermining or overtly resisting and challenging the ubiquitous hegemonic heterosexual matrix. (2008: 315)

In recent years, with many prominent celebrities declaring themselves to be feminist and campaigning on feminist issues, we appear to be living a “moment in which feminism has seemingly moved from being a derided and repudiated identity among young women to becoming a desirable, stylish and decidedly fashionable one” (Gill, 2016: 611). Whilst heeding Gill’s caution that just because feminism has become fashionable in, for example, celebrity culture, does not mean that postfeminist and antifeminist discourses have disappeared (ibid: 621), empirical work with girls themselves suggests that the power of such discourses can be overstated.

Girls, Resistance and Agency in International Development

Girls’ and women’s agency has been subject to some debate in poststructuralist feminist scholarship, particularly so in the study of girlhood in which scholars must navigate a difficult balance between condemning harmful discourses and being careful not to depict girls as passive victims of all things discursive. A great deal of media studies research with children depicts them as the passive recipients of powerful commercial messages (Zaslow, 2009: 37). Catherine Driscoll argues that studies concerning young people resisting hegemonic discourses tend to have focused on young men, while feminist cultural studies has a tendency “to represent and discuss girls as conformist rather than resistant or at least to study them almost exclusively with reference to that division” (2002: 11). For Dyhouse, contemporary writing about girlhood strikes a “gloomy” tone, with girls depicted as “victims” of social trends ranging from zero size models to pornography (2014: 2-3). The problem with constructions that situate girls as the victims of a powerful discourse is that they do not allow for girls’ agency; girls “do not appear as moral and political agents lodged in material conditions of harm, capable of analysing these conditions and proposing means of remediation”

(Gilmore and Marshall, 2010: 667). Some argue that feminist scholarship, in its emphasis on postfeminism, has at times fallen into the temptation of a “feminist melancholia – a disappointment, about a ‘daughter gone to bad,’ of a feminism ‘betrayed’” (Hey, 2010: 219). Yet, feminist scholarship should also pay close attention to girls’ acts of agency, reproduction and resistance in the face of dominant discourses (Rentschler and Mitchell, 2014: 3; Taft, 2011: 4). To do so requires engaging with girls not as future women (Currie, 2015: 29; Driscoll, 2002: 108) or as “human becomings” (Alldred, 1998: 150) but as subjects in their own right. For many scholars of girlhood studies, this is an important aim.

An example of research about girls’ resistance to powerful discourses can be found in a small body of literature by scholars working at the intersection of postcolonial and feminist theory. An important aim of postcolonial feminism has always been to move beyond depictions of silent, oppressed women in the Global South, whose images are used to justify interventions on various issues (Kumar and Parameswaran, 2018: 352). Recently, scholars have done so in their analysis of Pakistani girls’ education activist Malala Yousafzai. Studies have shown how the story of Yousafzai’s shooting by the Pakistani Taliban and relocation to the United Kingdom were appropriated by media to portray the United Kingdom as a benevolent saviour of girls targeted by extremists, reproducing gendered, Orientalist discourses about Muslim women in need of rescue (Olesen, 2016; Thomas and Shukul, 2015; Walters, 2016; see also Khoja-Moolji, 2017). These studies demonstrate how powerful interests have shaped the telling of Yousafzai’s story, subsuming it into wider discourses about East/West, Islam/Christianity, and about rescuing Muslim women. Despite the fact that Yousafzai was a blogger for the BBC from the age of 11, has written two books, given countless speeches at international institutions and established her own educational fund, media coverage of her story – and until recently, academic study of that coverage – has focused almost exclusively on what was being said about her.

A methodological strategy that has been used to analyse Yousafzai's agency is that of "reading against the grain," which entails "listening for excesses and tracing that which evaded the dominant discourse" (Khoja-Moolji, 2016: 9). Shenila Khoja-Moolji sees this as an important step towards an "empathetic engagement with girls, one that is open to different desires and investments of girls, messy enactments of girlhoods that include moving back and forth between dominant and subversive scripts" (2016: 15). She analyses Malala Yousafzai's first autobiography, arguing that it both reproduces "the familiar script about the oppression of Muslim girls" (2015b: 547) and "makes different kinds of knowledges possible" (2015b: 552). Although Khoja-Moolji devotes much of her article to Yousafzai's reproduction of dominant discourses, she also acknowledges that she "does not seem to be unaware of the political instrumentalization of her voice" (ibid: 551). In my own subsequent analysis (Walters, 2017) of Yousafzai's second autobiography (2015),⁶ I also adopted Khoja-Moolji's strategy of "reading against the grain," choosing to read the text as "speaking to, and against, attempts by those in both the West and in Pakistan to appropriate Yousafzai's story" (ibid: 29). I argued that Yousafzai actively counters the appropriation of her story by emphasising her Pakistani and Muslim identities to counter attempts to portray her as secular or 'Western,' by conducting a sort of "ethnography of the West" in which she portrays the UK as exotic and incomprehensible, frequently comparing it unfavourably to her home country of Pakistan, and by countering individualistic discourses of girls' success by emphasising the role that her family, teachers, classmates and organisations played in enabling her to become the global icon that she now is (ibid). I conclude that "depicting Yousafzai as a young woman whose story has been co-opted by powerful discourses in the West is not that different from depicting her as a young woman whose voice was silenced by the Taliban. Both do not go far enough in acknowledging her agency" (ibid: 35).

⁶ It is beyond the scope of this literature review to discuss in detail the important choice to focus on her second, and not her first, autobiography. My reasons for doing so, which are consistent with "reading against the grain," are discussed in the article (Walters, 2017: 29).

While this is just one example of many studies on how Southern women's self-representations in art and literature counter dominant discourses (e.g. Gilmore and Marshall, 2010; Manaf and Ahmad, 2006; Moore-Gilbert, 2009; Watson and Smith, 1992; Weems, 2009: 70; Yaqin, 2013: 173), for Sangeet Kumar and Radhika Parameswaran, "the privileging of textual critique at the expense of ethnographic and qualitative fieldwork methods" is also a "continuing blind spot within postcolonial theories' *oeuvre*" (2018: 354, emphasis in original). While there is a wealth of literature on the girl powering of development, analysing the texts, videos and websites produced by powerful development institutions (e.g. Bent, 2013a; Calkin, 2015c; Cobbett, 2014; Hauge and Bryson, 2014; Hickel, 2014; Koffman and Gill, 2013; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015; Shain, 2013; Switzer, 2013), very few studies have analysed girls' participation in girl power campaigns. Where they have done so, the focus has been largely on how the organisations running the youth programmes reproduce dominant discourses, as discussed earlier in this chapter (Collin, 2012; Hayhurst, 2013; Hayhurst, 2014; Hayhurst et al., 2014; Moeller, 2013; Moeller, 2014). While feminists' excellent critiques of girl power discourses can reveal a great deal in terms of analysing girl power discourses, they cannot tell us whether such discourses actually shape girls' ways of thinking and of being.

This reflects a broader gap in examining young women's negotiation of development organisations and discourses. A recent special issue of the journal *Gender and Development* on the topic of "Young Feminisms," which included an article based on the findings of this thesis (Walters, 2018), aimed to address that gap. The editors argue that "young feminists are highly critical of international development for its reductive vision of development as economic growth, and its top-down, hierarchical ways of working" (Davies and Sweetman, 2018: 388 & 398). The articles within the issue explore young feminists' creative ways of countering instrumentalist approaches to girls and young women in development (Bashi et al., 2018; Fonseka, 2018; Leiper O'Malley and Johnson, 2018; Nyambura, 2018; Saha et al., 2018; Walters, 2018). They discuss young feminists' exploration of new forms of activism, outside of the mainstream NGOs that they consider to have lost their way (Homan et al., 2018; Moraes and Sahasranaman, 2018) and they show that young feminist activism

is thriving (Ma et al., 2018; Marler et al., 2018). There is, therefore, an emerging literature on the many ways that girls and young women resist and negotiate instrumentalist discourses in development. My article in the special issue contributes to this by analysing how girls do so from *within* a campaign that is responsible for producing, and reproducing, those discourses. My research, therefore, makes two important contributions to the literature on the girl powering of development and to feminist, postcolonial scholarship more broadly. The first contribution is empirical, in that it addresses a gap in research with girls who participate in girl power campaigns such as Girl Up. The second is theoretical in that – as explored in the following chapter – I conceptualise the girls as activists who must negotiate a Girl Up discourse that does not always fit the forms of activism that they wish to pursue. In this sense, this thesis contributes more broadly to conceptualisations of agency in postcolonial, feminist research with girls.

Chapter 3 - Theoretical Framework

In researching girls' negotiation of the Girl Up discourse, I have adopted a poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial approach, which "recognises that global inequalities that are gendered and racialised remain entrenched" (Koffman and Gill, 2013: 85). It is an approach that not only offers insights on the many, intersecting inequalities faced by girls and women in the Global North and South, but it also opens up the possibility of exploring moments of resistance to these inequalities. In the first half of this chapter, I discuss poststructuralism, feminism and postcolonialism in turn, and how I see them as intersecting in an analysis of discourses about global girlhood. In the second half of the chapter, I identify some of the concepts I used to develop this research. In this study, I conceptualise the girls' participation in Girl Up as a form of activism, albeit one that requires negotiating participation in a campaign that perpetuates postfeminist and depoliticised discourses about girls. I draw on audience reception studies and cultural studies to conceptualise girls' negotiation of those discourses. In the final sections, I discuss various concepts taken from the literature on the girl powering of development, which offer important insights for analysing both the Girl Up discourse and girls' negotiation of it.

Theoretical Orientation

My adoption of poststructuralist analysis is premised on the assumption that both racism and sexism are discursive, that they simultaneously are produced by and produce hierarchical, unjust social relations (Richardson, 2004: xiv).⁷ Feminist poststructuralists have drawn on this interpretation of Foucault's knowledge/power nexus to demonstrate how patriarchal discourses are both produced by, and serve to reproduce, unequal gender relations in which men dominate positions of power. Similarly, since the very foundational texts of postcolonial scholarship, scholars such as Said have

⁷ Sections of this discussion of my theoretical orientation are taken from the article I published on British media coverage of Malala Yousafzai (Walters, 2016).

also drawn on Foucault's work to demonstrate how racialized discourses enabled colonialism to take place: "knowledge of subject races or Orientals is what makes their management easy and profitable; knowledge gives power, more power requires more knowledge, and so on in an increasingly profitable dialectic of information and control" (Said, 1979: 36). In the following paragraphs, I discuss how these strands of scholarship come together in this study in order to analyse discursive constructions of race and gender in the girl powering of development.

Poststructuralism is concerned with the operation of power through discourse. A discourse is "a system of statements in which each individual statement makes sense, [which] produces interpretive possibilities by making it virtually impossible to think outside of it" (Doty, 1993: 302). Certain understandings come to be seen as so commonsensical that they appear natural and those questioning them appear irrational or illogical and those understandings shape the possible ways of acting that seem available to us (Hall, 1997a: 6; Levitas, 2005: 3). As Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt argue, "we live in common sense – we do not think it" (1993: 479). Poststructuralist research aims to expose the assumptions that such understandings are premised on, to show how they might operate in the interest of those in positions of power and to show how these understandings, when they come to dominate perceptions of a given topic, might actually reinforce that power. A classic example to demonstrate this is in the designation of a person using violence for political motives as either a "terrorist" or a "freedom fighter." This designation is largely made by those in power – politicians, journalists, even academics – and has profound consequences for the subsequent actions taken in relation to that person. They may be heralded as a hero, given material and political support, awards and recognition for their struggle, or they may be demonised, arrested, imprisoned or killed. These actions will in turn often serve to shore up the position of those in power. For poststructuralists, then, nothing has any meaning to us outside of discourse (Darby, 1997: 44-5; Laclau and Mouffe, 1987: 85); "all knowledge is located within discourse" (Purvis and Hunt, 1993: 492; see also Hall, 1997b: 44-5).

Poststructuralist feminism aims to show how gender is constructed and therefore how it might also be deconstructed or reconstructed in alternative ways, opening up the possibility for all humans to be free to live as they choose and not according to the roles associated with their sex category (Kearney, 2009: 13). Poststructuralist feminists have shown how patriarchal discourses ascribe certain qualities as “natural” to women and men and the consequences of this: “discursive practices are key to the production of certain subject positions and associated emotions and experiences, and to the suppression of other subject positions” (Harris and Shields Dobson, 2015: 146). Feminist poststructuralist approaches have also been crucial to the development of the relatively new field of “girlhood studies” because they allow scholars to analyse the social forces that produce seemingly coherent ways of thinking about girls and to identify the limitations and contradictions inherent within them (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013: 188). The aim of “girlhood studies” and of feminist, poststructuralist research, is to explore the many ways in which girls take up, adapt or reject these subject positions, in order ultimately to “contribute to increasing the number of ways girls can ‘be’” (Jones, 1993: 162-4). Clare Bradford and Mavis Reimer identify girlhood studies as “less a discipline in itself than a set of questions about the cultural functions of girls and girlhoods that are taken up by scholars trained in a variety of disciplines” (2015: 4-5).

Poststructuralist postcolonialism aims to reveal the Northern, and frequently racist, assumptions that underpin seemingly commonsensical ways of thinking about global power relations (Hayhurst, 2013: 3.1). It analyses the legacies of colonialism on peoples of the Global South and how the actions of Northern states, international institutions based in the Global North and Northern transnational corporations might constitute new forms of colonialism and domination (Desai, 2016: 251). As Mohanty argues,

these mechanisms of informal and not violently visible empire building are predicated on deeply gendered, sexualised and racial ideologies that justify and consolidate the hypernationalism, hypermasculinity and neoliberal discourses of ‘capitalist democracy’ bringing freedom to oppressed third world peoples – especially to third world women. (2006: 9)

For postcolonial scholars, it is important to deconstruct representations of the South, to expose the Northern assumptions they are based on and in doing so, to challenge the interventions these understandings might lead to, be they military, economic or otherwise.

Historically there have been some tensions between postcolonial and feminist scholarship, with early postcolonial work accused of being gender blind, while feminist work has been accused of reproducing “the axioms of imperialism” (Spivak, 1999: 114) through attempts to “rescue” the Southern woman (Mohanty, 2006: 15). However, many scholars have been working at the intersection of postcolonialism and feminism for decades, in order to explore the multiple, gendered and racialized oppressions that women encounter everywhere. Furthermore, this study does not attempt to identify “errors” within the discourse analysed or present a more “accurate” portrayal of girls in a particular country, which would perpetuate the unequal power relations that determine who speaks on behalf of whom, and from where. The point of poststructuralist, postcolonial discourse analysis is not to assess “the correctness of the representation nor its fidelity to some great original” (Said, 1979: 21). Rather, I seek to do two things: firstly to analyse what representations in Girl Up can tell us about the Global North, thus problematising the power relations inherent within the campaign, and secondly to privilege the voices of girls themselves, in both the North and South, in order to analyse how dominant discourses emerging from powerful Northern institutions may differ from the understandings of those who are marginalised from positions of power by their age, gender and race. Geeta Chowdry and Sheila Nair argue that “from the view of many postcolonial scholars uncovering oppressions, and ultimately shifting one’s gaze towards the colonising practices of Europe and the United States, constitutes a form of resistance” (2002, 25). The combination of feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial analysis in this study enables the exploration of sexist and racist discourses in international development. Reversing the gaze onto those discourses, and focusing on girls’ negotiation and adaptation of them, are in themselves ways of challenging their hegemony.

Conceptual Framework

In the following sections of this chapter, I explore the various concepts that are useful in analysing girls' participation in Girl Up. I begin by discussing my conceptualisation of the Girl Up club members as feminist activists. Given that they are participating in a campaign that perpetuates postfeminist discourses about girls, I then go on to discuss how I conceptualise them as negotiating those discourses with their activism. In the final two sections, I focus on specific concepts from the existing literature on the girl powering of development which help to reveal new and interesting insights in the analysis later in this thesis.

Girls' Activism

As discussed in the literature review, in the 1990s and early 2000s, a popular refrain in the media and within academia was that societies in the Global North were experiencing a period of "postfeminism." Within academia, various studies emerged demonstrating girls' and young women's abandonment of feminist politics, from claims that young women were unable to identify structural sexism and discrimination when describing their own experiences of oppression, opting instead for individual narratives of making the wrong 'choices' (Harris and Shields Dobson, 2015: 147-8), or that girls felt that in the twenty-first century, sexism was no longer an issue for their generation (Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013: 193), to claims that "despite centuries of global oppression and resistance, women do not readily identify with the label of feminism" (Coppock, Haydon and Richter, 1995: 185; see also Buschman and Lenart, 1996: 69). This discourse is closely aligned with girl power discourses in development, in which girls in the Global North are seen to be always already empowered and feminism is seen as only necessary in the context of 'rescuing' girls and women in the South. However, in recent years, studies have begun to challenge the narrative that girls and women have embraced postfeminism and turned away from feminist politics. For some, it is time for "feminist media scholars to move beyond merely identifying postfeminist discourses within media culture and instead examine the complex ways in which feminist politics 'poke holes' in an often seemingly daunting and oppressive media culture" (Keller, 2015: 282).

Through my fieldwork with Girl Up club members, I came to conceptualise them as feminist activists. Girls' participation in politics has frequently been overlooked by campaigning organisations, the media, academia and girls themselves, despite research showing that girls are "equally (if not more) civically minded and politically oriented than their male counterparts" (Bent, 2013b: 174). Because girls have long been marginalised from formal political structures, both because of their age and because of gendered discourses that have historically constructed politics as a masculine arena, their participation in activities of a political nature can be overlooked. Jessica Taft, drawing on her work with girl activists, argues that if feminist scholars are to fully embrace the mantra that "the personal is political," then those studying girls' activism need to acknowledge the many informal ways that girls are involved in politics. These include, for example:

Online blogging that challenges the sexualisation of girls, resisting and confronting a domineering boyfriend, father or brother, everyday practices of interaction across differences in a public park, mentoring other girls, media-making, participation in human rights organisations and social movement activism. (2014: 263)

As the following chapters show, the Girl Up club members I met were engaged in all of these different forms of activism.

One of the recurring criticisms of the girl powering of development, and of development policy more broadly, is that it draws on feminist concepts such as empowerment and depoliticises them (Calkin, 2015a: 302; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 159; Roberts, 2015: 222; Switzer, 2013: 347). Taft argues that "empowerment, as it is currently articulated, is quite distinct from activism" (2011: 23-4). This is because current, neoliberal articulations of girls' 'empowerment' tend to focus on "personal change [...] the power to make choices and construct their own individual identities" (ibid: 29). By contrast, she argues, the girls in her study "are interested in substantial social change, they are 'empowered,' but they are critical of the narrow versions of empowerment usually offered to them" (ibid: 23-4). Because of their exclusion from formal political structures, the girls in her study turn instead to their own political activities, including for example, "political education, building participation and creating alternative spaces, institutions and communities" (ibid: 164).

They do not see themselves, she argues, as activists in “training” for some future, more meaningful political participation, but rather focus on what they can achieve and their rights to participation today (ibid: 52). In conceptualising girls as activists, regardless of their exclusion from meaningful participation in formal political structures, researchers can thus expose the “many problems that young people face and are finding difficult to confront and change, due to the rules and boundaries set by adult-led institutions and hierarchies, including education, the family and the state” (Tyyskä, 2005: 11).

While a small number of studies, including Taft’s work (see also Davies and Sweetman, 2018), have analysed girls’ activism in organisations and movements that challenge mainstream politics and development policy, this study explores how girls do activism as part of a campaign that reproduces postfeminist development discourses. In order to do that, it is necessary to conceptualise the girls in relation to powerful discourses in a way that goes beyond a simplistic binary of victimhood or resistance and allows for the negotiation of those discourses.

Negotiating Discourse

The concept of “negotiating” discourse is taken from the work of Stuart Hall. Hall argues that a media text has a “preferred meaning” (1997c: 228), that is, the meaning which the creator or creators intended it to purvey. However, the creator of a media text has no control over how a reader or viewer might “decode” that meaning (1980). Hall identifies three positions from which decodings may take place: dominant, negotiated and oppositional (1980: 136-138). In a dominant reading, the viewer or reader decodes the message of a media text within the same terms of reference in which it was encoded, in other words, interpreting it according to the preferred meaning. An oppositional reading is one in which a reader or viewer chooses to decode a message “in a *globally* contrary way” (1980: 137-8, emphasis in original), meaning that they adopt a critical stance and question the assumptions and logic the text is based on. A negotiated reading, however, “operates with exceptions to the rule,” meaning that while a viewer or reader might accept large

parts of a dominant discourse, they find exceptions to this interpretation, often based on their own context or “local conditions” (1980: 137).

Women’s negotiation of discourse has been explored by scholars of feminist audience studies, who have critiqued the tendency in media studies to place audiences in a passive role, especially so when the audience is made up of women or children. Instead, they highlight how women “appropriate the media as a site of meaning construction, actively engaging and, occasionally, contesting images and themes of gender domination” (Craig Watkins and Emerson, 2000: 157). Meenakshi Gigi Durham argues that “a critical shift occurred in the mid- to late 1980s, when women’s popular culture was no longer seen as a vast wasteland whose audiences comprised of gullible dupes” (2003: 24). Indeed, feminist audience reception scholars have even been accused of going too far to the other extreme, with a tendency to “romanticise reception, as an instant, however complicated or qualified, of independent creativity or political resistance” (Radway, 2008: 329; see also Schiappa and Wessels, 2007: 17). By focusing on how women resist or negotiate cultural texts, scholars have been accused of inadvertently dismissing the need to critique harmful discourses and the interests they serve (Parameswaran, 2003: 312-3). For Janice Radway, the tendency to depict audiences’ responses to a text as either being “under the sway [...] or resistant to its pleasures and incitements” (2008: 337) ignores the ways in which the reader negotiates multiple, pre-existing discourses and identities as they encounter the text and will draw on those in order to interpret it. By highlighting this third possibility – of adapting a text to fit with our prior understandings – feminist audience reception studies has pioneered what has been labelled a “modified Foucauldian approach,” one that “views women as historical subjects who are moulded by authoritative (and persuasive) media discourses, but are not ‘passive recipients’ of dominant messages” (Parameswaran, 2003: 317; see also Jackson and Vares, 2015: 5). It acknowledges that “individuals are neither fully autonomous, nor living scripted lives” (Zaslow, 2009: 36).

In analysing the various subject positions the girls adopt in relation to the Girl Up discourse, audience reception studies and cultural studies can offer a great deal of insights. For example, Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel have argued that although teenage popular culture may well frequently represent commercial interests, it can also be a forum for young people's self-expression (2006: 47). While Girl Up clubs may reproduce discourses that serve the interests of powerful institutions and corporations, they are also a forum for girls' self-expression. Similarly, Janice Radway's study of women reading romance novels concluded that although they persistently chose to read material that reproduced patriarchal norms of female passivity and subservience, the women she studied used their reading as a time to place a "barrier" between themselves and the demands of their husbands and families, taking the opportunity to take a break from domestic and emotional labour (Radway, 2006: 223). Even when the women were not questioning the content of the novels, Radway argues, they were engaged in an act of "individual resistance" against their responsibilities as wives and mothers (ibid: 223-4). Similarly, even when they were not questioning the Girl Up discourse, girls' clubs were a safe space for them to gather, free from the harassment and bullying of their male peers. Ien Ang's work analysing viewers' responses to the US TV soap opera *Dallas* also offers insights into the subject positions women adopt when they are aware of the many criticisms of the show (2006a: 193). While some reproduce these criticisms, expressing their dislike for the show, others take pleasure from watching it regardless, while others still love the show but adopt an ironic stance towards it when asked about it or viewing it in public (ibid: 195). These works show that audiences' readings of a media text are rarely either dominant or oppositional, but more often a complex interplay of different interpretations and subject positions "that may not be easily integrated in a smooth, finished and coherent Theory" (Ang, 2006b: 555-6; Ang, 2012: 149). These authors advocate empirical research with audiences in order to understand the complexities of their negotiations of patriarchal discourses and the moments of agency within them, even if women's readings of a text, or even a situation more broadly, may be very different from a feminist reading of that same text or situation (Rakow, 2006: 209).

At times in this research, the girls' reproduction of the Girl Up discourse was even strategic, providing a forum for their own activist goals that was also palatable to their peers and to their teachers. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has theorised how marginalised groups faced with universalising, essentialist discourses that would limit the ways of being available to them must at least engage with these discourses in order to challenge them (Grosz and Spivak, 1990: 12; see also Danus, Jonsson and Spivak, 1993; Lee, 2011: 263). As is explored in later chapters of this thesis, at times the girls needed to engage with postfeminist, depoliticised discourses about girlhood in order to make their feminist, more radical forms of activism acceptable within the school environment. Feminists have long tempered their activism and strategically engaged with development institutions (Chant and Sweetman, 2012: 525-6), even "co-opting the UN as their unlikely godmother" (Snyder, 2006: 45) in order to achieve at least some of their goals. However, until recent campaigns such as Girl Up, girls have rarely been allowed or invited to participate in such institutions. This participation, then, represents an exciting opportunity to theorise how they do so, negotiating their activism within a campaign that perpetuates instrumentalist and postfeminist discourses about girls.

Michel Foucault was clear that discourse was not simply a representation of power but rather "the power which is to be seized" (1981: 52-3). He was also clear that dominant discourses were not all-powerful: "where there is power, there is resistance" (2006: 349). By conceptualising the girls as activists who negotiate girl power discourses in development, I am not denying that these discourses are both extremely powerful and highly problematic. Nor am I suggesting that these girls are in a position to "seize" power and counter with their own discourses. Rather, my aim is to demonstrate the agency that the girls show and to suggest that these discourses are frequently disrupted. In the following sections, I discuss some of the specific concepts that scholars have identified in girl power discourses and which the girls in this study must negotiate.

Constructions of Northern and Southern Girlhoods as Opposing Subject Positions

A concept of central importance to my analysis is “oppositional girlhoods,” which captures how “global girlpower discourses reduce the intersectional complexity of girls’ lives into oppositional representations that reinforce artificial, neo-colonial divides between and among girlhoods” (Bent and Switzer, 2016: 123). In this construction, Northern girls are encouraged to see themselves as always already empowered, with every opportunity available to them and nothing holding them back. By contrast, Southern girls are seen as constrained by outdated gender norms that only Northern intervention will help to break down. Their lives, daily experiences and opportunities are seen as completely opposed to one another. This leaves no space for Southern girls to claim agency within their own lives, nor for Northern girls to also be the victims of patriarchal norms. In campaign videos and materials, the girl powering of development appeals to the Northern girl to help resolve this difference. Yet, just as it claims to be creating solidarity amongst girls by asking the Northern girl to care about her Southern counterpart, this discourse actually serves to reproduce or even widen the divide between them.

The discursive construction of “oppositional girlhoods” is similar, but subtly different to another one identified by Elizabeth Marshall and Özlem Sensoy in 2010 as “missionary girl power,” by which they meant “the newly emergent discursive strategies that construct first world girls as the saviours of their ‘Third World’ sisters” (2010: 296). They were referring in particular to the wealth of stories that were emerging post-9/11 of girls living under regimes such as the Taliban and accompanying campaigns to encourage girls in the Global North to donate money to supposedly relieve their plight. While Marshall and Sensoy’s concept is strongly linked to Orientalism and constructions of secular, white women as the saviours of their Muslim counterparts, it clearly resonates more broadly with the girl powering of development and Girl Up’s call to Northern donor-spectators to raise money for “the hardest to reach girls living in the places where it is hardest to be a girl” (Girl Up, nd a). While both “missionary girl power” and “oppositional girlhoods” capture the recent focus on calls to girls in the Global North to ‘rescue’ their Southern counterparts, I largely

draw on Bent and Switzer's concept because "oppositional girlhoods" captures the greater focus in campaigns such as Girl Up on the Northern girl and the opportunities she has available to her. The focus of the "missionary girl power" discourse is still largely on the girl who is supposedly in need of rescue – Northern girls read about her plight and give a donation. However, in the "oppositional girlhoods" discourse, the construction of the Northern girl as having endless opportunities available to her is crucial in mobilising her to fundraise for girls' education. Indeed, raising money to fund a less fortunate girl's education is seen as adding yet another accomplishment to her already impressive CV. While the two concepts are strongly related, I most frequently draw on "oppositional girlhoods" to analyse how Girl Up's construction of girlhood in the North and South as opposing subject positions serves to construct a barrier between girls that the campaign purports to be uniting in solidarity.

Similarly, I draw on Ofra Koffman, Shani Orgad and Rosalind Gill's analysis of Girl Up as constructing Northern girls as the "sisters, saviours and 'BFFs' of their Southern counterparts" (2015: 161; see also Chant, 2016b: 316). They take this analysis further by arguing that the model of participation in Girl Up, which encourages Northern girls to engage in activities such as posting on social media, buying Girl Up merchandise and buying or selling clothing and jewellery from other girls to raise money, constitutes what they call "selfie humanitarianism": "in which the expression of solidarity is predicated on a refashioning of the self through consumption, self-broadcasting, self-branding, self-promotion and media production" (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 161). Rather than encouraging dialogue between the Northern and Southern girl, or encouraging the Northern girl to inform herself about the Southern girl's life, the campaign encourages the Northern girl to focus on herself and her own life, which is, it implies, more interesting and worthy of being broadcast to the world (ibid: 162-4).

These concepts are central to my analysis of the subject positions for girls in the North and South in Girl Up and the "artificial, neo-colonial" divides that they construct (Bent and Switzer, 2016:

123). Building on Bent's critique of *The Girl Effect* and Koffman, Orgad and Gill's critique of *Girl Up*, I apply these concepts to a much more in-depth analysis of *Girl Up* promotional materials than has been conducted to date. I then turn to juxtaposing these constructions with girls' own interpretations and negotiations of the *Girl Up* discourse. In doing so, I make visible the "intersectional complexity" of girls' lives that is obscured by them (Bent and Switzer, 2016: 123).

Northern Girlhood as Spectacular

With its focus almost entirely on girls in the Global North as capable of changing the world, I argue that the *Girl Up* discourse is part of what Sarah Projansky (2014) has identified as the "spectacularisation of girlhood." Building on Anita Harris's (2004) analysis of the two subject positions available to girls in neoliberal societies – "can-do" and "at-risk" – Projansky analyses spectacular discourses in media discourses about girls. She describes spectacularisation as follows:

First, media incessantly look at and invite us to look at girls. Girls are objects at which we gaze, whether we want to or not. They are everywhere in our mediascapes. As such, media turn girls into spectacles – *visual objects on display*. Second, some mediated girls are also spectacular, as in *fabulous*. The can-do girls' achievements, athletic abilities, intelligence and self-confidence dazzle. Third, some girls are spectacles, or *scandals*. (2014: 5, emphasis in original)

I argue throughout this thesis that *Girl Up*'s depiction of the Northern girl is strikingly similar to the spectacular girl identified by Projansky: "the impossibly high-achieving heterosexual white girl who plays sports, loves science, is gorgeous but not hyper-sexual, is fit but not too thin, learns from her (minor) mistakes and certainly will change the world someday" (2014: 1). Such girls are visible everywhere from magazines and films, to news reporting about girls' achievements. Risk is still never far from this lauding of girls' achievements, though, with the media seizing just as readily on the story of the "crash-and-burn girl": "the can-do girl who has it all, but who – through weakness and/or the inability to live with the pressure of celebrity during the process of growing up – makes a mistake and therefore faces a spectacular descent into at-risk status" (Projansky, 2014: 4). Girls are portrayed as spectacular, but when they fail to be so, they are also spectacles. It is this combination that for Projansky shows "a concomitant love *and* contempt for girls" (2014: 4). There are many

consequences of this media obsession with the spectacular girl. The first is that most girls, as a result of the colour of their skin, their size, their lack of resources, their disability or any number of other characteristics, cannot live up to this ideal. Another is that seeing girls as spectacular, and focusing on their seemingly impossible individual achievements, obscures the fact that such achievements would have been impossible without a great deal of support from communities, other girls and adults. As Emily Bent argues, “spectacular discourses celebrate the promise of girl empowerment while almost instantaneously erasing the socio-cultural and geopolitical support systems that make girls’ exceptionality possible” (2016: 108).

Like Emily Bent (2016), I apply this concept to girls’ activism in international politics, analysing how “can-do” discourses in the Global North about girls’ great academic success and achievement resonate with girl power discourses in development and their calls on girls to save the world. International institutions and Northern media have seized upon the stories of girls such as Malala Yousafzai in recent years to claim that when they are given an education, girls can change the world (Khoja-Moolji, 2015a; Khoja-Moolji, 2017; Olesen, 2016; Thomas and Shukul, 2015; Walters, 2016). Bent recounts her experiences of trying to facilitate girl activists’ participation in UN decision-making processes, describing how the girls were ultimately unable to live up to spectacular goals of changing the world, not because of their own lack of ability or effort, but because of their marginalisation within the structures they were trying to influence. She concludes: “despite the promise of girls’ exceptionality, girl-activists struggle against the normative limits of age, generation and power” (2016: 112). By identifying spectacularisation in *Girl Up*, I theorise how *Girl Up* club members are set up to fail to meet the impossibly high standards of the discourse. By “reading against the grain,” I also highlight through their interpretations and conversations how girls themselves counter spectacular discourses and stress the need for adult allies and support networks to help them in their activism.

Conclusions

In summary, the adoption of a poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial theoretical framework offers insights into how girls in the Global North and South negotiate the Girl Up discourse. In combining the work of feminist scholars on girls' activism and the work of poststructuralist cultural theorists' work on discourse, I conceptualise the girls in this study as engaged in a form of activism that must negotiate participation in a campaign that reproduces girl power discourses. They are feminists engaged in political activism from within a campaign that perpetuates individualistic, postfeminist and depoliticised discourses about girls. Conceptualising the girls as activists is consistent both with my theoretical orientation and my feminist approach to methodology – as outlined in the following chapter. Far too often, girls' lives are studied for what they can tell us about their future adult selves and girls' political engagement is seen as training for a future in activism. It is therefore important that research on girls' lives acknowledges and respects the activism that they are involved in now and the impact that it might have, even if it takes place within the context of, and at times reproduces, problematic discourses about girls.

Chapter 4: Methodology

In feminist research, poststructuralist discourse analysis can help to explore how women negotiate different subject positions and can even assume positions of power within oppressive discourses (Baxter, 2002a: 840; Pomerantz, Raby and Stefanik, 2013: 188). As discussed in the previous chapter, I conceptualise the girls in this study as negotiating the Girl Up discourse. I draw on the work of feminist scholars of audience reception studies in exploring the ways that girls “contest” dominant discourses (Craig Watkins and Emerson, 2000: 157), negotiate unequal power relationships and find active subject positions within them (Fenton, 2000: 738; Kitzinger, 2001: 102). In order to do so, I adopt two methods: a discourse analysis of the Girl Up discourse, and a discourse analysis of focus groups with Girl Up club members. In this chapter, I outline each of these methods, including sources of data, practical considerations in data collection and the form of data analysis used. Finally, I discuss the ethical implications of conducting a research project of this kind using a feminist approach to methodology.

The Girl Up Discourse

In order to analyse girls’ negotiation of the Girl Up discourse, I first identify the discourse itself. The first source of data for this is the campaign’s own website, from which I downloaded posters, videos, “fact sheets,” impact reports and photos of Girl Up’s work.⁸ This produced a total of 21 texts, videos and photos to analyse, ranging from a single page flyer to a 15-page “Club Starter Kit,” detailing how girls can go about setting up a club. A second source of data was an interview I conducted with a staff member from Girl Up, which took place in 2016. Unfortunately, however, I have not been able to obtain permission to use quotes from that interview in this thesis. The interviewee requested to see drafts of anything quoting her words directly but has since ceased responding to my emails, either to confirm receipt of the drafts or to withdraw from the study. While that conversation does

⁸ All of these resources were last downloaded on 24 October 2017.

inform my understanding of the Girl Up campaign, I am not analysing specific quotes from it. Several days after the interview, the staff member in question added me to a Girl Up mailing list. Since then, I receive regular emails about the campaign's work, most of which are asking for donations. My third source of data on the Girl Up discourse is therefore the 29 emails that were sent to me over a one-year period between November 2016 and November 2017.⁹

Discourse analysis is not about "pointing out an error but about looking at how structure has been constructed, what holds it together and what it produces" (Gonick, 2006: 2; see also Hall, 1997c: 228). If poststructuralists conceptualise discourse as a form of power, then poststructuralist discourse analysis is concerned with exposing the unequal power relations that produce, and are produced by, discourse. It aims to determine how it is that certain statements come to be made about a topic, the interests that they serve and the alternative possible perspectives that are excluded in speaking about the topic in this way (Graham, 2011: 667). While much has been written on the advantages of using poststructuralist discourse analysis, prescriptions of method for analysing texts using poststructuralist discourse analysis are very rare (Fairclough et al., 2011: 361; Graham, 2011: 666-671). Above all, poststructuralists reject claims that the close following of a particular method will guarantee accuracy or replicability, instead acknowledging that no two analysts will reach the same conclusions (Graham, 2011: 666). As Hall writes, "Language is *not* an object which can be studied with the law-like precision of a science" (1997: 35). As critical discourse analyst Teun Van Dijk argues, there are, however, various analytical tools that discourse analysts of all theoretical orientations have developed in order to analyse a vast array of different materials, from media texts to conversations (2011: 2). In the following paragraphs, I outline some of these that I have found particularly useful in analysing the Girl Up discourse.

⁹ All of these emails and their titles are listed under "Personal Communications" at the end of the references section.

A key aim of poststructuralist discourse analysis is to analyse how subjects are constructed and positioned in relation to one another, and in this regard Roxanne Doty's method of analysing "predication, "subject positioning" and "presupposition" is of particular use (1993). Predication is the "linking of certain qualities to particular subjects through the use of predicates and the adverbs and adjectives that modify them. A predicate affirms a quality, attribute or property of a person or thing" (Doty, 1993: 306). Predicates can also serve to set up subjects in relation to one another, or "subject positioning," which can reveal a great deal about the power relations inherent in a discourse (ibid). Subject positioning frequently entails an explicit or implicit binary opposition in which subjects, peoples, religions, cultures and so on, are presented as polarised opposites, for example good/bad, civilised/primitive, developed/developing, empowered/disempowered, active/passive, et cetera. As Hall argues, "there is always a relation of power between the poles of a binary opposition" (Hall, 1997c: 235). For these subject positions to make sense, the shared meanings, assumptions and logic – or "presupposition" – they are based on must appear natural or common sense (Doty, 1993: 306). The audience or reader must fill in information, drawing on discursive formulations of a given topic, to construct a kind of truth: "they argued A, so C, we must supply B ourselves" (Richardson, 2004: 75-6).

A poststructuralist analysis of visual materials follows a similar approach of identifying meanings that resonate with wider ways of making sense and analysing how those meanings might reflect power relationships in society. Cathryn Magno and Jackie Kirk follow a six-step analysis template for analysing images of girls in international development campaigns about education (2008; see also Magno and Kirk, 2010). They start by identifying the "surface meaning" of an image, meaning the impressions a viewer gets from a brief look at it and the "narrative" of what is happening in the image. They then identify the "intended meaning" of the image, based on their analysis of what the campaign or photographer are trying to convey and the "ideological meaning," or values that the image conveys in the context of wider discourses around the topic. Further steps of analysis then include adopting an "oppositional reading" of the image by considering how it may

be decoded in alternative ways and analysing the “coherency” of the image to other materials or texts from the same source (Magno and Kirk, 2008: 353-4). For example, while a picture of a happy girl sitting outside a classroom building is intended to represent the positive impact of a particular girls’ education campaign, a possible oppositional reading would be that she is happier being outside of the building because of teasing or harassment on the inside (ibid: 357). Their focus on “coherency” leads them to question why it is that images of development campaigns focus on pre-pubescent girls, usually pictured alone, while the text of the campaigns describes working with girls of all age ranges and of building solidarity or togetherness in girls. This leads them to suggest that images of younger girls on their own are less threatening to the assumed Northern donor and pre-pubescent girls’ presumed innocence and passivity suggest that they will make willing and disciplined students (ibid: 358-60). In summary, discourse analysis of both texts and images seeks to identify dominant meanings and how they reflect power relations, consider their consistency with other texts and/or discourses and consider what other possible meanings they might serve to silence.

I also adopt an approach based on Shenila Khoja-Moolji’s strategy of “reading against the grain” (2016). She argues that her own previous research in Pakistan “engaged with girls only to hear, and re-articulate, Eurocentric knowledges around personhood, community and citizenship” (ibid: 746). She reflects critically on how a series of educational camps she and a colleague organised for girls in 2011 reproduced dominant discourses about human rights and about gender relations in Muslim societies (ibid: 752). However, years later, she decided to “re-turn” to the words of the girls in the Urdu and Sindhi language essays they wrote at the end of the camps, this time focusing on the “seepages and excesses of their voices to signal their differently-lived and differently-constituted investments and desires” (ibid: 746). She calls this endeavour “doing the work of hearing girls’ voices” (ibid). She argues that girl power campaigns in development have recently focused on soliciting girls’ voices in order to give legitimacy to their work, for example when the Girl Effect used quotes from girls in the Global South as part of its attempts to try to influence

the negotiations surrounding the Sustainable Development Goals (ibid: 749). However, she argues that this is a “circular logic” in which campaigns gather evidence from girls within their programmes with the specific intention of showing how needed their programmes are (ibid: 749). These campaigns, therefore, fail to do the work of hearing girls’ voices because they only hear that which reproduces dominant understandings. By contrast, in revisiting her data, she sought to find “that which escaped privileged categories” (ibid: 753). In order to do this, she looked for ideas “that were hidden or buried under dominant codes and themes” (ibid: 753). She goes on to conclude that this led her to draw different conclusions from the same texts, seeing the “different meanings” the girls produced (ibid: 758). This is not a strategy that disregards the dominant discourse: indeed, it must identify it in order to identify the seepages from it. Rather, it is an attempt to listen to girls’ interpretations and understandings that do not fit neatly into preassigned categories based on campaigns’ priorities or on researchers’ preconceptions. I have also applied this approach to the Girl Up campaign itself, seeking moments of slippage and excess that do not fit dominant girl power discourses in international development, acknowledging the role not only of girls, but also of feminist staff within the campaign, in trying to shape a more radical agenda.

In analysing Girl Up materials, I coded words and images reflecting the dominant discourse discussed in Chapter 2, before returning to the data and coding also for words and images that evade the dominant discourse. As I have discussed, postcolonial scholars have critiqued the tendency in development to portray peoples in the Global South as passive, poor, ignorant, lazy, dangerous, underdeveloped and helpless. Postcolonial feminists have shown how development imagery tends to portray Southern women as in need of rescue from Southern states or Southern men. They have also documented how recent portrayals of “positive images” of girls in the Global South tap into neoliberal and efficiency discourses in development by using an essentialist argument to place responsibility on supposedly altruistic and hard-working girls to provide for their entire families and communities (Chant, 2016b: 316). I interrogate these representations not with the purpose of revealing a different, “true” representation of girls in the Global South, but rather to

analyse what they can tell us about power relations between North and South. This entails firstly, a close analysis of the words or images and their content, then secondly, linking this to the wider social context that produced the text or image and within which it will be read (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015: 7; see also Wehbi and Taylor, 2012).

To give a brief example to illustrate this form of analysis, the introductory page of the Girl Up Club Starter Guide (Girl Up, nd d: 3) describes Girl Up as a “community of nearly half a million passionate advocates,” who are also “youth leaders” and “dedicated youth,” who “stand up, speak up and rise up to support the hardest to reach girls.” This brief example illustrates how Girl Up club members (who in this discourse are assumed to be in the Global North, as discussed in the analysis in Chapter 5) are described as passionate and dedicated advocates and leaders, while the brief mention of the girls they are trying to help (assumed to be in the Global South) are simply hard to reach. Within the wider context of this campaign, this text sets up the Northern girl as hard-working and capable. She has a voice and a platform to “speak up,” she is in a position of power (a leader) and she is part of a “community” of like-minded girls. By contrast the Southern girl is not listed as having any skills or capabilities. All that we know about her is her position in relation to the Northern campaign and to efforts to fund girls’ education more widely – she is hard to reach. Not hard enough, however, to be beyond the reach of the “dedicated” Northern girl’s activism. This sets the two girls up in a binary opposition of saviour and victim, rescuer and rescued. There are many presuppositions that the reader must make for this text to make sense. We must assume that the Northern girl has the ability to change the Southern girl’s life, that the Southern girl needs and wants that intervention, that she wants to be “reached” and that nobody else will reach her. In doing so, we do not question the power relations that mean that a Northern girl has opportunities, a platform and an education while a Southern girl might have none of these, or the Northern-prescribed interventions that are made in the name of rectifying the difference between them. Alternative interpretations are silenced and only certain interventions are made possible. While this is an

example from just one text, for discourse analysts, if the same logic can be seen to underpin a range of different texts, then we have identified a “dominant discourse” (Doty, 1993: 309).

Girls’ Negotiation of the Girl Up Discourse

In analysing how girls negotiate the Girl Up discourse, I chose to conduct focus groups with club members. My aim was to speak to girls from a variety of clubs in different locations in the Global North and South (as discussed below). The focus groups served two purposes: firstly, to gather information about the activities the girls were undertaking as part of their clubs and secondly, to construct a group conversation between the girls allowing me to analyse their negotiation of the Girl Up discourse. As a method, focus groups open up a window “into the formation, contestation and negotiation of ideas, understandings and claims” (Gray et al., 1996: 217; Jowett and O’Toole, 2008: 464).¹⁰ They are an excellent way to generate public discourses about a topic within a certain context and setting (Smithson, 2000: 114). It is a process that enables the researcher to understand how the group reaches a collective understanding of a topic, or not, and to listen to them discuss it in their own vocabulary (Överlien et al., 2005: 334).

Focus groups are ideal in exploring the ways in which girls take up, adapt or reject discourses about them. While, as feminist poststructuralist researchers, we may enter the focus group with preconceived ideas about the dominance of a particular discourse, one of the strengths of the focus group method is the possibility for a conversation to be led by the group participants themselves and for the conversation, therefore, to throw up interesting and unexpected findings (Montell, 1999; Myers and Macnaghten, 1999: 175). Concerns about the generation of normative data in focus

¹⁰ During the MSc Social Science Research Methods year of my 1+3 ESRC scholarship, I used the dissertation component to conduct a pilot study of the focus group method with girls in schools in Bristol. I later went on to publish my methodological reflections from that study, supplemented by further research I had done for this thesis (Walters, 2019). Therefore, some of the literature review on focus groups with young people and on the use of activities in focus groups in the following paragraphs makes a similar argument and draws on similar sources to that dissertation and article, reflecting my continuing interest in a feminist approach to focus group methodology.

groups, where participants parrot the dominant view of the group, are irrelevant to poststructuralist research, which rejects the assumption that each individual within the group has one “true” opinion that risks being lost within the group interactions (Gomm, 2008: 322; Holbrook and Jackson, 1996: 136; Wilkinson, 1998: 118). In a study of discourse such as this one, the instances in which the participants agree, are brought round to agreement by other members of the group or are vocal in their disagreement all provide interesting material to analyse in themselves because they demonstrate the adoption, negotiation or even outright rejection of dominant discourses.

While there is perhaps no one definition of what a feminist approach to research methodology might be, many researchers have proposed models that all share similar characteristics and values, to which focus groups are well suited (Munday, 2006: 94). In brief, feminist research “seeks to respect, understand and empower women” (Campbell and Wasco, 2000: 778). Along with a focus on analysing gender and gendered power relations, the values that have been identified as central to a feminist approach to research methods include a rejection of the idea of conducting “value-free” research (Edwards and Mauthner, 2005: 15); a focus on research participants within a specific context and in relation to other people and social processes; a heightened concern for research ethics and analysis of the role of the researcher in the research (Maynard, 1994: 21); a reflexive approach to the hierarchical nature of research relationships (Maynard, 1994: 15); and an emphasis on the possibility to achieve consciousness-raising in research processes (Montell, 1999: 46-7). Scholars working at the intersections of feminist and postcolonial research have argued for the need to address hierarchical power relations in research by aiming to “conduct research *with* rather than *on* the study subjects” (Riaño, 2016: 268). This enables the exchange of information between researcher and participants and acknowledges the expertise and experiences of all involved.

Researchers have found that focus groups correspond to these values in many ways. For example, in a successful focus group, the participants are able to interact with minimal intervention

by the researcher, allowing them greater control over the conversation and helping to reduce the power imbalances in the research process (Bagnoli and Clark, 2010: 104; Esim, 1997: 139; Munday, 2006: 98; Van Staveren, 1997: 132). This increased control also allows the participants to ask questions of the researcher, making an exchange based on mutual learning possible. Given the more than ten year age gap between the participants and me and the possible differences with many of them in terms of nationality, ethnicity, first language, educational level and class, and the fact that I ultimately had the power to decide what the research was about, how the data was analysed and how the findings would be presented, there was undoubtedly an unequal power relationship in the research. While the power imbalance cannot be fully eliminated, the choice to use a method in which I am outnumbered by the participants is an attempt to go some way towards redressing this (Caretta and Riaño, 2016: 258; Tang, 2002: 707; Wilkinson, 1998: 114). Feminist scholars have also argued that the act of bringing a group of women together in a discussion can be empowering both in the opportunity that it gives them to voice their opinions and in the consciousness-raising that can result from discovering that they are not alone in these experiences (Maynard, 1994: 17; Montell, 1999: 54). In summary, while focus groups cannot necessarily be described as an inherently feminist method, they are compatible with many of the values that feminist scholars identify with.

Various scholars have also argued that focus groups as a method are well suited to research with children and young people, although there is disagreement within the literature over why. The greatest point of contention in this regard is in whether children require special research methods in order to be communicated with (Allison, 2007: 262; Harden et al., 2000). Here the different arguments in the literature reflect different theoretical approaches, as well as experiences of working with very different age groups of children and young people. For example, Lorna Porcellato et al. argue that children require special research methods because their “differing levels of competence and comprehension, their short attention spans, their eagerness to please and their inherent egocentrism all need to be accommodated” (2002: 309) while Caroline Heary and Eilis

Hennessey argue that a group context deemphasises the adult-child relationship and so helps to mitigate children's desire to respond in a way they perceive the researcher would like them to (2002: 48). These arguments assume that adults never demonstrate short attention spans, eagerness to please, egocentrism or different levels of comprehension. As Jeanette Åkerström and Elinor Brunnberg argue, such claims "serve to exaggerate both the differences between children and adults, and the similarities between different groups of children" (2013: 529). Morgan et al. concluded in their research that focus groups work well with children for precisely the same reasons they work well with adults and that any research participants might benefit from a group setting (Morgan et al., 2002: 16).

There is a difficult balance to make in avoiding patronising claims that see children as passive and incapable while still acknowledging that children's frequent marginalisation from decision-making processes will indeed affect research relationships (Alldred, 1998: 152; Harden et al., 2000; Harris et al., 2015: 584). Whilst rejecting the idea that sweeping generalisations can be made about children's behaviour and abilities, I see it as important to consider how the context of the research might set the researcher up as an authority figure (Morgan et al., 2002: 8). In this study, this was inevitable given the choice to conduct the focus groups in schools, where adults set and enforce rules about behaviour. In a school setting, children may feel they must behave in a certain way during the focus group, from not swearing, for example, to raising their hand before they speak. While the researcher can do a great deal to alleviate these concerns with their tone, body language and behaviour, the use of focus groups can also help by breaking down the formality of a one-to-one interview and creating an atmosphere in which the researcher does not have complete control. For these reasons, they are an excellent method to use with children, not because children as a homogenous group find it more difficult to communicate than adults, but rather because they often find themselves in situations where they have no control. I therefore decided to use focus groups, with the ethos that "When space is made for them, children's voices express themselves clearly" (Mauthner, 1997: 21).

Recruitment of Participants

My initial aim was to speak to as many clubs, in as broad a range of contexts, as possible. However, I found contacting clubs extremely difficult. Girl Up claims to be a “community” of “more than 1,900 clubs registered in 48 U.S. states and territories and 98 countries” (Girl Up, nd b). However, many of the clubs shown on a map on the Girl Up website were listed as having no activity (Girl Up, nd e). Furthermore, the clubs were heavily concentrated in North America, as illustrated in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Map of distribution of Girl Up clubs, January 2017

It is very difficult to assess how many active Girl Up clubs there are. Figure 1 shows the distribution of Girl Up clubs worldwide in January 2017, while Figure 2 shows a greatly reduced number visible in July 2017. In both, the number of clubs shown is well under the 1,900 figure claimed elsewhere on the website. Three out of six of the schools participating in my research had clubs that were active but no longer shown on the map by the time I met with them, for reasons unknown to them. This suggests there may be many more active clubs that I was unable to contact using the data on the website. By contrast, from the responses I received from schools, many of the clubs listed on the website were not active or, in some cases, did not exist. Appendix 2 lists all of the clubs I contacted

and their responses. Of the 42 clubs I contacted in various countries, ten schools replied to engage with the research, 23 did not reply and nine replied to say that they did not have, or no longer had, a Girl Up club.



Figure 2: Map of distribution of Girl Up clubs, July 2017

While it was challenging finding active Girl Up clubs to participate in the research, it was even more so trying to find clubs in a range of different contexts. As discussed in Chapter 1, membership of Girl Up was initially only open to girls in the US but has since opened to girls anywhere. Nevertheless, the maps suggest that Girl Up clubs are still overwhelmingly concentrated in North America. In the January 2017 map, some 802 out of 946 clubs were in North America. Many of the resources available on the Girl Up website (Girl Up, nd f) had not been updated to reflect the change in membership at the time of the research and none of them were translated into any language other than English.¹¹ As such, many of the resources were still directly targeted at girls in the US. When clubs do exist in countries outside of the US, they seem to frequently be located in international or American schools.

¹¹ Girl Up eventually translated parts of its website into five other languages in November 2018.

The six schools that did participate in the research are shown in the table below. While certainly not the range or number of clubs I had hoped to work with, speaking to six different clubs in three countries, across a range of fee-paying and state-funded schools, including one school located in the Global South that is not an international school, does represent a range of experiences and backgrounds of girls participating in Girl Up.

Table 1: Research participants and their locations

School	Location	Group	Participation
State-funded secondary school and sixth form	North Wales	Chloe Leah Charlotte Bethan Siobhan Jessica Daniela Lauren Sophie Rhiannon Anwen Ellie Hannah Lucy Katie	Each group participated in two focus groups in September 2016 and January 2017.
Fee-paying (\$20 per term) school	Township of Lilongwe	55 girls	Focus groups with eleven groups of five girls. Follow-up focus groups with seven groups of five girls. All took place in February-March 2017.
International school (between \$13,000 and \$20,000 per year depending on parents' tax status)	Central Lilongwe	Ahadi Shrimayi	One focus group along with their teacher about why they wanted to set up a Girl Up club.
State-funded school	New Jersey	Emily Madison Isabella Mia Emma Hailey	Two focus groups in March and April 2017.

Fee-paying girls' Catholic school (\$15,000 per year)	New York	Gabriella Nicola Lucia	One focus group in April 2017.
Fee-paying school (\$40,000 per year)	New York	Kaitlyn Abigail Sydney Anna Megan Riley	One focus group in April 2017.

Fieldwork Locations

The fieldwork locations were intended to include girls participating on both sides of the discursive divide between Global South and Global North established in the Girl Up resources. Chapter 5 analyses the Girl Up resources on the website in detail, but to summarise briefly here, they divide the world into a simplistic binary of Northern countries where girls have opportunities and education, have bright careers ahead of them, are able to make choices about who and when to marry and fundraise to help their worse off counterparts; and Southern countries where girls cannot go to school, live in poverty, marry young, bear many children and are waiting for investment from benevolent Northerners to unlock their potential. This divide is exemplified by Figure 3, a still from the 2010 Girl Up video *Connecting the Dots* (United Nations Foundation, 2010b), where the black dots are supposed to represent the vast number of girls in the Global South who have a “lot fewer options” than their Northern counterparts. On this map, Malawi (in South-East Africa) is situated under a sea of black dots, while the UK and US are both left white. The UN Development Programme currently ranks Malawi 170th in its Human Development Index and estimates that a girl in Malawi will spend an average of just 3.8 years in school (compared to 5 years for a boy) (UNDP, nd a). This, coupled with the fact that Malawi is one of the six countries that funds raised for Girl Up go towards, places it firmly within the Global South in this divide. By contrast, the UK ranks 16th in the world on the same index and the US tenth, and in both countries, girls can expect a slightly higher number of years of education on average than boys (16.7 compared to 15.9 in the UK and 17.3

compared to 15.8 in the US) (UNDP, nd b; UNDP, nd c). This places both countries firmly in the Global North in this divide, both in terms of development and of girls' educational opportunities. In the Girl Up discourse, then, the UK and US are countries where girls set up clubs and fundraise, while Malawi is a country where girls cannot go to school and live in poverty.



Figure 3: Still from Girl Up video Connecting the Dots (United Nations Foundation, 2010b)

The two clubs in Lilongwe complicated this North/South, fundraiser/beneficiary divide by their very existence. For example, despite facing extreme poverty, the girls in the township of Lilongwe set up a club to fund scholarships for their friends. Nevertheless, when I showed these girls the *Connecting the Dots* video, they identified with the depiction of the Southern girl. They attended a school where many girls struggled to pay the fees and dropped out as a result. The two girls in the international school in Lilongwe were in an even more ambiguous position. International schools have been theorised as a “dense, transnational space of gendered, racialised, inter-class relations” (Tarc and Tarc, 2015: 48), where social groups of belonging can be disrupted by local, national and global factors. While international students attending because of a parent’s job may be globally mobile, their cultural and emotional connections to the country they are living in might be very

limited (Bates, 2011: 6; Bunnell, 2005: 49). Their peers who are national citizens of the school's host country might be sent to an international school to study an international curriculum and make global contacts, yet their families may not currently have any overseas connections (Hayden, 2011: 218). Such children might be amongst the most privileged in their own country – being able to afford the fees of an international school – but find themselves amongst the least wealthy in a school full of ex-patriate elites (Gardner-McTaggart, 2016: 14; Tarc and Tarc, 2015: 35). Nationally, culturally and economically, they are a site that cannot easily be labelled as belonging in any straightforward way to either the Global North or South. The two girls at the international school – one a British citizen who had lived in Malawi all her life, and the other a Malawian from Lilongwe – identified with the Northern girl in Girl Up resources and saw themselves as empowered, able to make choices and decisions and able to help their less fortunate counterparts elsewhere in Malawi. Their discussions focused on how they could use the resources available to them to benefit the girls in the “villages” or “rural” areas of Malawi. Therefore, I conceptualised the international school as belonging to the Global North, meaning I worked with five schools in the Global North and one in the Global South. As I explore in Chapter 10, I was able to set up links between the schools in the North and South at the girls' request, mostly through the exchange of contact details of their teachers. This led to face-to-face meetings between the girls in the two schools in Lilongwe as well as a Skype conversation between the girls in the township of Lilongwe and the girls in North Wales. While this was not a conscious methodological strategy from the outset of the research, it generated fascinating research data that allowed me to explore the girls' negotiation of discourses of oppositional girlhoods, which are discussed in Chapter 10.¹²

¹² While there is some research on the use of Skype and other digital technologies in qualitative interviews (e.g. Deakin and Wakefield, 2014; Lo Iacono et al., 2016; Palys and Atchison, 2010; Seitz, 2016) as well as a body of work on making transnational connections between women through research (e.g. Cockburn, 2000; Luke, 2008; Marx Ferree, 2006; Marx Ferree and Pudrovska, 2006; Nagar, 2002; Naples, 2002; Stienstra, 2000; Wakeford, 1997), an interesting field for further exploration is the potential for using technologies such as Skype to bring together research participants in different locations and the relationships that such encounters can foster.

Focus Group Practicalities

I took the decision to work only with girls, although some of the clubs had male members (Gibson, 2007: 476; Heary and Hennessy, 2002: 52; Mauthner, 1997: 23). In this case, given that the research question was about how girls negotiate powerful discourses about girls, this was an easy decision to make. Furthermore, in a pilot study of the focus group methods that I conducted with girls in schools in Bristol in the summer of 2015, several girls said they found it easier to discuss feminism without boys around (Walters, 2019: 6). While it would be very interesting to speak to male Girl Up members, in this case I wanted to focus on the girls' points of view, and in doing so, I also gathered some interesting data on their perceptions of boys' participation in the clubs.

The girls' backgrounds, religion and ethnicity varied greatly. I chose not to systematically ask the girls about their background and identities. Doing so would involve making assumptions about their lives that I do not have the data to support and would also risk leaving my own identity as white, middle class and British as unproblematised (Hoong Sin, 2007: 482). While constantly being referred to as an "mzungu," or "foreigner," in Malawi highlights the facts that in some settings I was much more of an outsider than others, in no setting was I an insider. Even within my own country, I met girls whose first or second language (Welsh) was one I do not speak.

Language was one aspect of identity that acted as an occasional barrier to girls communicating with me openly in Lilongwe. While English is the official language of Malawi, for the majority of the population it is a second language after Chichewa. On the advice of the school director, I made no plans to recruit an interpreter for the focus groups, however, when I arrived, I found that many of the girls struggled to express themselves in English. Although the secondary school curriculum is conducted in English in Malawi, the emphasis on rote learning meant that the girls rarely had the opportunity to express themselves in English during lessons. Outside of class, they spoke Chichewa with their friends, parents and siblings. Some of the focus groups featured

long silences. During my pilot study of focus groups with girls in Bristol, I concluded that my use of group activities had made the focus groups more successful because they forced me to relinquish more control to the group, to allow them to control the conversation and to allow longer silences for the girls to formulate their ideas (Walters, 2019). I tried to approach the language barrier issue in Lilongwe with a similar attitude, focusing on my role as moderator in creating an environment in which all girls felt able to contribute to the conversation if they wanted to, rather than making assumptions about girls' communicative abilities. I also tried to involve the girls in conversations about how they would feel best able to participate. At the end of one group that featured particularly long silences, I asked the girls if they would like an interpreter, to which Linda replied, "we can manage ourselves." So instead, I encouraged the girls to speak to one another in Chichewa and then translate for me as a group, taking the pressure off individual girls and their language abilities, and in the second round of focus groups, I gave the girls the option of doing a writing activity instead of speaking, as discussed in the next section. These strategies seemed to work well and to allow each girl to contribute. For example, in the following extract, Chikondi was having difficulty making her point:

RW: Say it in Chichewa if you want.

Chikondi: (Chichewa)¹³

Fatsani: It will improve our chances.

Chikondi: The whole country can improve, cos when you educate women you educate a nation.

Fatsani: Yeah.

Perhaps all Chikondi had needed was a chance to discuss her answer with her peers before saying it to me in English, which she then did very clearly. Eventually, I was satisfied that this strategy,

¹³ I have taken the ethical decision not to get these Chichewa extracts translated as they were said by the girls with the impression that I did not understand.

combined with the use of writing activities, meant that every girl had been given an opportunity to contribute her ideas if she wanted to.

The focus groups in all six schools lasted anywhere between thirty minutes and an hour, depending on the time the school had available. I was able to return for a second time to the state-funded schools in the UK and New Jersey. The school in the township of Lilongwe also made a room available for me to run focus groups almost every day over a five-week period. In this school, eleven groups of five girls participated in the first round of focus groups and seven groups of five girls took part in the second. The decrease in numbers reflects the decrease in girls' attendance towards the end of term as they were unable to finish paying the term's fees. In these three schools, I was able to follow up on interesting points that had come up during the first focus group and to ask the girls more in-depth questions about their activities. The analysis often focuses more on these schools for that reason. In the two fee-paying schools in New York and the fee-paying international school in Lilongwe, the girls' busy schedules only made it possible for me to visit once.

I used prompts and activities during the focus groups to help stimulate conversation. These included showing videos and resources from the Girl Up website, group writing activities and asking girls to write their thoughts on post-it notes and stick them onto large sheets with visual representations of the questions I was interested in exploring (see Appendix 7). Activities such as these work well in a group setting, making the session more participatory and interactive (Colucci, 2007: 1424; Walters, 2019). I used the prompts and writing activities as a catalyst for discussion, to encourage participants to get involved in the conversation from the very start and hopefully remove any pressure they may feel to say something particularly profound (Allan, 2011; Barbour, 2008: 82; Buckley and Waring, 2013: 149; Lyon and Carabelli, 2016: 432).¹⁴ The use of writing activities was also particularly useful in the township of Lilongwe, where English was a second language for the

¹⁴ An outline of the first focus group is shown in Appendix 6, while photographs of the visual questioning techniques I used in the second focus groups are shown in Appendix 7.

girls. When I gave the girls the choice between writing and speaking, all of the girls participated, where during the first – speaking only – focus groups, many of the girls had remained silent.

Data Transcription and Sorting

I transcribed all of the focus groups verbatim. One dilemma I faced was whether to transcribe the data as spoken or to ‘polish’ it. There is a great deal of power in this decision, as in all decisions relating to how to present research data (Ribbens and Edwards, 1998). As Kay Standing argues,

By the very use of language we can serve to reinforce inequalities of knowledge, by presenting our findings in our academic voice [...] positioning this next to the women’s words in a way that makes them look ‘authentic and simple.’ (1998: 199-200)

This was of particular concern for me in transcribing the words of the girls in Malawi, for whom English is a second language. It applies in every context, however, and I found myself equally uncomfortable transcribing the words of a girl in the UK with a stutter or a girl in the US who used the word “like” every two or three words. However, the alternative of ‘polishing’ the language seems equally inappropriate as it risks changing the meaning of the girls’ words. While there may be a power imbalance in me transcribing the grammatical errors of the girls in Malawi and quoting them alongside my own academic writing, which I have spent many hours editing, there is equally a power imbalance in me deciding to correct the girls in a language they speak daily. Furthermore, from a postcolonial perspective, perhaps the inclusion of those ‘errors’ might help to highlight the colonial legacies that mean that for these girls the language of education, of opportunity and of Girl Up club is not their first language.

A transcription itself is a construction, requiring decisions by the researcher about how to represent the talk and excluding the conversations that came before or after the recording took place (Hammersley, 2003: 759). I used audio recording because I felt that a video recorder might be distracting for the girls. Whilst facilitating the discussion and making notes on who was speaking when, I was unable to note physical movements and

gestures, so these are not included in the analysis (Morgan and Krueger, 1998: 48). I have, however, drawn on the following conventions of focus group transcription to add small details that are not revealed by words alone (Bloor et al., 2001: 62; see also Bailey, 2008):

[: indicates the start of overlapping speech

(): indicates incomprehensible speech

[]: transcriber comments, such as laughter, long pauses, or a change in tone such as whispering.

I used NVivo qualitative data analysis software as a tool to help me manage a large data set of transcripts from thirty focus groups, an interview, fieldwork diary entries and all of the marketing materials I had gathered. I used the software as a tool to create a database of references and coded extracts (Mauthner and Doucet, 1998: 122), allowing me to jump quickly from one topic or concept to another and from an extract back to the full transcript. The latter function helps to avoid becoming so engrossed in the minutiae of a particular extract, or in the “indexing and splicing” of the data, so that the overall social setting of the research begins to disappear (Birch, 1998: 179). The NVivo function that allows the user to make reports also allowed me to keep reflecting on the analysis process and to keep a record of the steps taken (Flick, 2014: 370).

In the first pass of sorting the data, I read through each transcript and coded relevant extracts according to the concepts outlined in my theoretical and conceptual framework in Chapter 3. Amanda Coffey and Paul Atkinson call this the process of “data reduction,” in that it is about sorting through a large data set and identifying those extracts that are of relevance to my conceptual framework (1996: 30). During this pass, the codes used are “a priori,” meaning that I have imposed them on the data based on concepts I have identified from the literature. After this process was complete, I read through the data in each coding category to analyse how the extracts did or did not reproduce discourses identified in the literature. Having done this several times, I began the second pass at coding the data, “data complication” (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996: 30). This process involves

teasing out new analytical categories and interpretations within and across the previous codes. At this stage, I used “emergent” codes, that is analytical concepts emerging from the data in participants’ own words but also capturing my own analysis of what is being said (Spencer et al., 2014: 272). For example, a girl in North Wales told me, “we’re still limping a bit” in the UK in terms of achieving gender equality. “Still limping a bit” then became a category to which I coded all extracts where girls in the Global North seemed to be challenging the dominant discourse of Northern societies having already achieved gender equality. Reviewing these coded extracts allowed me to “read against the grain” on two levels: firstly by gathering together all of the excerpts from different groups and settings that challenge the dominant discourse in similar ways; and secondly by analysing individual extracts in detail, to see how the utterances of one or multiple girls within a group challenge an otherwise dominant reproduction of a discourse.

Analysis of the Co-construction of Meaning

Discourse analysis of focus group data analyses how discourses are constructed within a group (Smithson, 2000: 110). It aims to reveal “the ways in which shifting power relations between speakers are constantly negotiated through the medium of competing discourses” (Baxter, 2002a: 829). This involves treating interactions between research participants (including their interactions with the researcher) as research material, something which is frequently neglected in favour of treating an individual’s words as though they were uttered in a one-to-one interview (Munday, 2006: 99; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009: 13; Wilkinson, 1999: 77; Wilkinson, 1998: 112). A focus on the interactions between participants opens up the possibility that a group consensus was in fact reached through coercive behaviour or the censorship of opposing viewpoints and can also highlight where a seeming focus for the group is in fact a topic or view of particular importance to one, dominant member who continually brings the conversation round to that perspective (Kidd and Parshall, 2000: 300-1). While this has led some scholars to debate whether it is the individual, the group or the interaction that constitutes the unit of analysis in focus group research, Pamela Kidd

and Mark Parshall argue that “neither one is *the unit* of analysis, whereas either or both might be a *focus* of analysis” (2000: 299).

As outlined above, I have used transcription symbols that add detail beyond simply what is said and by whom, with the purpose of analysing not only participants’ words, but also their interactions. These details include listing pauses of over one second, overlapping turns and laughter. For example, if group members are interrupting one another to express the same opinion, then it may show a high level of consensus between them. However, if one member expresses a view and the rest of the group is silent for some time, it could show disagreement or uncertainty about the view expressed. The focus on group conversations, rather than individuals’ words in isolation, helps to highlight levels of consensus or dissent, power relations within groups and my own role as moderator in framing the conversation.

My use of transcription tools more commonly found in conversation analysis than discourse analysis may seem incongruous with a poststructuralist framework. However, I believe that they can offer insights into the co-construction of meaning within the group, without needing to challenge the fundamental theoretical assumptions of the research. One criticism levelled at poststructuralist discourse analysis of focus group data by conversation analysts is that it is guilty of “ascription,” meaning that the resulting findings “merely [reflect] the theoretical perspective of the analyst and the immediate concerns of the project” (Woofitt, 2005: 182). While heeding conversation analysts’ call not to ignore the rich data that interactions within focus groups provide – albeit in less detail than conversation analysis would require – I reject many of the theoretical assumptions underpinning conversation analysis, including treating the conversation data as naturally occurring (Wilkinson and Kitzinger, 2017: 75), avoiding imposing analytical categories (such as gender) onto data extracts where participants have not oriented towards them (Ehrlich, 2002: 732-3; Kitzinger, 2000: 171; Speer, 2002: 785) and the assumption that it is ever possible to conduct analysis without any influence of the researcher’s pre-existing categories and concerns (Wetherell, 2014: 110).

Discourse analysts argue that it is possible to pay attention to the minutiae of group interactions and what they can tell us about how a group collectively make sense of a topic, whilst also paying attention to wider societal meanings and ways of making sense (Baxter, 2002a; Baxter, 2002b). This is what I aim to do in the analysis chapters that follow.

Poststructuralist discourse analysis also makes it possible to explore how the focus group conversations counter dominant discourses. As I have discussed in Chapter 3, I conceptualise the girls as negotiating discourse, drawing on Stuart Hall's three positions of audience reception: dominant, negotiated and oppositional (1980). In analysing data extracts from the focus groups, I look for the interactions between participants that show where different discourses conflict or overlap and where the dominant discourse is ruptured.¹⁵ As an example, I analyse the following extract below, in which girls in the UK school are discussing the Girl Up *Connecting the Dots* video I had just shown them:

Chloe: It said like the eighty five percent and it made a percentage and it made like that was the shocking part, the percent was the shocking part and I don't think the percent should be the shocking part I think it should be

Leah: That it happens.

Chloe: Like all of it should be the shocking part because it happens and it is on a big scale, but it has to combine to really make a difference.

Charlotte: I think things like that are good though where they put you in the issues cos I know, like what we've been saying if it, unless it happens to white people, people don't really care.

Chloe: Yeah.

Charlotte: And that's that's really bad.

¹⁵ This approach is also important because it demonstrates the complexity of participants' talk and interactions, avoiding the patronising assumption that apparent contradictions are evidence of young people's lack of linguistic or cognitive sophistication (Alldred, 1998: 165).

Chloe: It is yeah.

[Lines omitted]

Charlotte: But videos like that do help because they they make you

Leah: Mm

Chloe: Think about

Charlotte: Kind of empathise [with it

Chloe: [Yeah

Leah: [Yeah.

Charlotte: And pay attention to what's going on.

Leah: I think it would've helped a little bit more if it wasn't a cartoon.

Bethan: [Yeah.

Chloe: [Yeah.

As has been described above and is explored in much greater detail in the next chapter, the Girl Up discourse represents the Northern girl as hard-working, committed, capable and keen to help her Southern counterpart. The video in question ends with the lines “you can make this change happen right this second, so what are you waiting for?” (UN Foundation, 2010b). In the Girl Up discourse, all that is needed to bring about this change is to educate Northern girls in a simple and effective way about the lives of their Southern counterparts and they will then join the campaign. This focus group extract, however, shows that the girls do not adopt a dominant reading of the Girl Up discourse.

The extract starts with Chloe questioning the use of statistics in the video to “shock” the viewer. Although not an oppositional reading, it already shows some critical questioning of the choices made by Girl Up staff in representing the issue. Leah’s interruption to finish Chloe’s sentence suggests she agrees with this critique. Charlotte immediately cuts in to counter by voicing her support for the message of the video. However, she does so by arguing that videos such as

these are important because “people” – here presumably people in the UK, Northerners or “white people” more broadly – only care about issues if they happen to “white people.” Although Charlotte approves of the video, her reading of it is not entirely dominant because, unlike the “passionate advocates” in the Global North in the Girl Up discourse, she sees Northerners as racist and apathetic, which complicates the subject positioning of Northern saviour, Southern victim. Chloe is quick to agree with this assessment of Northern audiences. In the following section, Charlotte tries once again to assert that the video will “help” by making Northern people empathise with the plight of Southern girls. While Leah and Chloe seem to be agreeing with their utterances of “yeah” and “mm,” Leah moves the conversation on, leaving no pause, to a new criticism of the video – that the cartoon format is not appropriate for raising awareness on an issue of this kind. This draws immediate and simultaneous agreement from Chloe and a fourth girl, Bethan, and the group have now returned to critiquing the video’s format as Chloe was doing at the very start of the extract. An analysis of the interactions, overlaps, consensus and disagreements here can tell us a great deal about the girls’ negotiation of the Girl Up discourse. The girls reach a consensus on one thing alone: that Northern publics are generally racist and apathetic. This does not fit with a dominant reading of Girl Up. They disagree on the format of the video and their discussions include critiquing the use of statistics and of animation to convey a message in a way that was meant to “shock” or simplify the issue. This negotiated reading accepts much about the video (for example, that Southern girls need assistance from the North), but also adapts it to fit with the girls’ pre-existing understandings (for example, that Northern publics are racist and apathetic). This brief example shows how my analytical approach of reading against the grain, and of paying attention to interactions within a focus group, can reveal seepages in an otherwise seemingly dominant reading of the Girl Up discourse.

Research Ethics

All of the methodological decisions discussed in this chapter will have shaped the data that resulted from the focus groups. In all of these situations I have tried, consistent to my feminist approach to

research methods (Maynard, 1994: 21), to prioritise ethical concerns and to consider what the girls themselves would get out of the experience of participating alongside my own concerns about answering the research questions. In working with groups of girls under the age of 18, various ethical considerations must be considered to ensure they give their full and informed consent to participate in the research. Once more, for the researcher keen to avoid patronising assumptions about children and young people, there is a difficult balance to strike between recognising the importance of ethics in research and also questioning “the immediate association between children and ethics” (Harden et al., 2000). In the following paragraphs, I outline the steps I took before and during the project to ensure an ethical approach to the fieldwork.¹⁶

My first decision was to only contact Girl Up club members through their school or youth group. Every Girl Up club must have an adult ‘advisor’ registered as part of their club, meaning that most are based within schools or youth groups. Some girls may form their own clubs outside of these formal structures and then list a parent as advisor. Although it would be interesting to talk to such clubs, especially given that part of this research is about the marginalisation experienced by girls within formal institutions such as schools, to contact those girls would only be possible by joining the Girl Up ‘community’ on the website. This would involve posing as a Girl Up club member myself, which I deemed to be deceptive and unethical. By contrast, where a Girl Up club name listed on the club map included the title of a school (Girl Up, nd e), I contacted staff at that school and asked them to consult with girls about whether they would be interested in participating. This situated the research within established safeguarding procedures that schools have in place.

My second concern was in getting informed consent from the girls and their parent or guardian about the project. If a school said they were willing to participate in the research and some of the club members were interested, I then forwarded an information and consent sheet (see

¹⁶ My application to the university’s research ethics committee included applying for a Disclosure and Barring Service Check and submitting copies of my youth work qualification gained in a previous role, which included training on safeguarding children. A copy of my approval letter is given in Appendix 1.

Appendix 5) to be signed by the girl herself and a parent or guardian if she was under the age of 18. Consent forms for children participating in research can be a contentious issue. By stressing that the participant is not allowed to take part in the research without a parent or guardian's consent, they can appear to place more importance on the adult's consent than on that of the participant themselves. A girl might feel that because her parent or guardian has signed the form, she must now participate (Heary and Hennessy, 2002: 53). I therefore took great care to explain to the girls that it was up to them whether they wanted to take part or not.

A third important decision was what to do when girls had forgotten to get their parents to sign their forms, as frequently occurs (Berg, 2012: 77). Unfortunately, this involved turning away keen research participants and in one school in New York, cancelling two focus groups because the teachers had not distributed the forms I sent them in time. In another school in New York, the teacher had not read the attachment to my email and so had created her own consent form, containing information taken from my email about the purpose of the project and what it would involve. In this group, I took great care to explain the material in the information sheet to the girls at the start of the focus group and I left digital and printed copies of it with the teacher to distribute, to ensure that the girls, teachers and parents all had that information and my contact details should they have any questions. In all focus groups, I took time to explain the right to anonymity, the right to withdraw at any time and the possible uses of the data, all of which was also contained in the information and consent sheet.

A fourth decision was the age of girls to recruit as research participants. My original assumption was that Girl Up clubs would mostly be active in the latter stages of secondary school and I therefore planned to recruit research participants between 14 and 18 years old. However, it became clear partway through the focus groups in the school in New York that this was another aspect of the consent form the teacher had not read, meaning several of the girls were younger than my minimum age of 14. This was also the case for a very small number of girls in the township

school in Lilongwe. Again, this only became apparent once a focus group was already under way. I took the decision not to cut the group short, as this would place the younger girl in the spotlight and mean that none of the girls would be able to participate because of her. I later reflected on these groups and decided that I had done enough to gain the girls' informed consent to participate, which was also backed up by their teachers and their parents. The youngest girl was eleven years old.

A fifth important ethical decision was in the content of the focus groups. While participation in Girl Up is not necessarily a very sensitive topic, some of the discussions covered topics concerning sexism in society more generally, including sexual harassment, rape and abuse. I encouraged talk about the girls' perceptions of their prevalence in society generally, for example, and not on a personal or anecdotal level. None of the girls disclosed any information of a sensitive nature about themselves or anyone they knew during the focus groups.

A sixth consideration was anonymity. In some areas, there are very few Girl Up clubs, so it might be possible to trace the clubs I am referring to using the Girl Up club map. Throughout the research two issues occurred to me in this regard: firstly, that girls experienced stigma in every setting for attending a Girl Up club and secondly, that many of the members talked about knowingly ignoring the UN Foundation's club rules. For both reasons, it was important that information disclosed by the girls could not be linked back to a particular school or club. As well as giving girls pseudonyms, therefore, I have also removed any identifying information about a school or its specific geographical location.

A seventh and final consideration was the request of my interviewee – the staff member from Girl Up – to see drafts of anything quoting her words before it was finalised, giving her the chance to check that her words had been quoted in the context she intended them. I made this available to her in early 2019 and, given her lack of response, decided to remove those quotes from the final thesis.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have outlined my methodological approach to answering my two research questions about identifying the Girl Up discourse and analysing how girls negotiate it. A particular concern running across all methodological considerations for me has been a feminist approach to research, giving my participants a meaningful, interesting and hopefully enjoyable opportunity to express their views on a topic that is of importance to them and giving careful thought at all times to research ethics. This focus, which is consistent with my theoretical framework in approaching the research, is aimed at listening carefully to girls' views and being open to the possibility that they may disrupt any preconceptions I had about the Girl Up campaign and participation in it. They certainly did so. It is to these interesting insights, made possible by my methodological choices, that the remaining chapters of this thesis now turn.

Chapter 5 – The Girl Up Discourse

In this chapter, I analyse the Girl Up discourse in order to situate it within wider girl power discourses in development and also to begin to argue that there is much about girls' participation in Girl Up that goes "against the grain" (Khoja-Moolji, 2016). As discussed in Chapter 4, the materials analysed in this chapter are taken from the Girl Up website and Girl Up fundraising emails. These materials include a Club Starter Guide (Girl Up, nd d), an impact report on the first five years of the campaign (Girl Up, nd c) and various documents downloaded from the resources section of the Girl Up website (Girl Up, nd f), including fact sheets about five of the countries where the campaign funds girls' education projects (Ethiopia, Guatemala, Liberia, Malawi and India; the campaign also supports projects in Uganda but no fact sheet was available at the time of the research), posters for club members to put up around their schools, photographs of Girl Up-funded educational projects and a promotional video explaining what the campaign is about (United Nations Foundation, 2010b). I start by analysing the many ways the campaign reproduces girl power discourses in development, depicting Southern girls as helpless victims and Northern girls as their saviours. This analysis is structured into four sections: instrumentalism and the positioning of girls' education as an easy solution to complex problems; discourses that see girls' sexuality as inherently risky to this model of empowerment; the spectacularisation of girlhood; and the construction of "oppositional girlhoods." The first two are strongly linked, in that they position girls in the Global South as individually responsible for managing their education and their bodies in order to contribute economically to their communities. The third – spectacularisation – places individual responsibility on a girl in the Global North to use her spectacular talents to do nothing short of saving the world. Finally, the oppositional girlhoods discourse constructs these two positions as opposites of one another. I then dedicate a section of the analysis to two particular Girl Up resources: a promotional video entitled *Connecting the Dots* that was created at the time of campaign's launch to summarise succinctly what the campaign is about and the "Girlafesto" poster, which is sent to all new members with the

suggestion they display it in their school. These were the two resources I used as prompts during the focus groups. In the final section of this chapter, I adopt Khoja-Moolji's (2016) strategy of "reading against the grain," seeking to find instances that disrupt dominant girl power discourses in development. From encouraging girls to take up political lobbying, to suggesting that they volunteer at a local women's shelter, some Girl Up materials challenge dominant discourses. Sometimes this is official policy and sometimes, as discussed below, it seems to be a tolerance of club members' own interpretations and actions, regardless of whether they follow the official guidance. The examples analysed in this section hint at a more complex picture than the literature on the girl powering of development might lead one to assume and they give an interesting context for the analysis of girls' participation in Girl Up clubs that follows in the rest of this thesis.

Girl Up Resources and the Instrumentalist Case for Investing in Girls

Like many other girls' education campaigns, Girl Up frequently reproduces an instrumentalist logic for investing in girls' education. To do this, it must do two things: first, convince the reader or viewer that a donation will guarantee a girl's education and second, convince them of the great things she will go on to achieve with that education and the ensuing benefits to her family and wider community.

Girl Up's fundraising emails are full of promises about the simplicity of ensuring girls have access to education. One email in 2016 urged supporters to "donate and give girls the uniform and textbooks to get into a classroom and on track to a brighter future. The solution is simple, and we need your support" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017a). Another email states that "\$25 gives one girl the uniform, textbooks and supplies to go to school for one year. It puts a girl on track to be empowered to pursue her dreams" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016g). Another email in November 2017, entitled "Fund her bike. Fund her future," asks Girl Up supporters to donate towards bicycles for girls in Malawi for the following reason:

In Malawi, less than 25% of girls will finish primary school – even though it is free. While girls can attend primary school at no cost, distance is actually one of the

biggest obstacles keeping girls out of school. A long commute can put school out of reach. And, for girls who do try to go, it can increase their risk of experiencing violence or harassment, causing them to drop out of school. A bike can help change all of that. (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017u, emphasis in original)

Research has found that sexual abuse is one of the biggest issues facing girls trying to access education in Malawi (Bikisa et al., 2009: 290; Maluwa-Banda, 2004: 81). Here, a bike is presented as a quick fix that will keep the girl in school. The email implies that the problem with violence against girls is that it makes them drop out of school, not the violence itself. It does not specify how the bike solves the problems identified, but we are left to assume that with a bike, a girl can travel greater distances and pedal away from potential attackers faster. The reader is invited to assume that this means that underlying problems have been solved.

In other emails, Girl Up makes claims about the potential impact of a donation far beyond the solution (girls' education) that they are directly funding. One email from December 2016, with the subject line "I'm worried, Rosie," informed me that "With an education, a girl is safe, empowered and free from pressures of child marriage, child labour and violence. She has the tools she needs to transform her community and the world" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016f). Another email from the same month stated that "With access to education, girls are healthy and safe from violence" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016e). There is no explanation of how education can achieve these goals and no mention of the issue of violence and harassment *within* school. In the Girl Up discourse, a bike, a school uniform and some textbooks are all that is needed to keep girls safe, reduce rates of child marriage and pregnancy and boost economies. It has nothing to say about the many factors that are not resolved by a bike or a textbook: predatory boys and men (Baric, 2013: 148), gendered cultural norms around marriageable age for girls, teachers' discriminatory attitudes towards girls (Kamwendo, 2014), warring parties to a conflict, governments, international institutions, the structure of the global economy and so on, or how the bike or textbook do – or most likely do not – affect any of those. It is exemplary of the campaigns that Chawansky argues

“seem to supply easy solutions to complex problems and position girls as the solutions to problems for which they are not (ultimately) responsible” (Chawansky, 2012: 474).

The Girl Up discourse also promises that the girls whose problems have been fixed by an education will go on to do great things. Despite purportedly advocating for girls’ rights, Girl Up relies time and again on a narrative that sees girls as worthy of investment because of what they might achieve for everybody else (Chant, 2016b: 315-6). For example, an email about Monica, a girl whose family has fled the violence in South Sudan and is currently in Uganda, explains that

she wants to become an engineer so she can return to her own country when there is peace and help rebuild it. When you invest in a girl, you invest in an entire community and, because of girls like Monica – an entire country. (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016b)

The email falls short of advocating investing in Monica simply because she has a right to an education, but rather makes promises about what she might go on to achieve that place the responsibility for rebuilding a future, post-conflict South Sudan on the shoulders of children. Girl Up’s report on its first five years of activity echoes many girl power campaigns in development by arguing that “when you invest in a girl, you are investing not only in her, but in her family, her community and our world” (Girl Up, nd c: 6). It goes on to explain that educated girls delay marriage, have fewer children, earn more and are more likely to access healthcare for themselves and their children. For every increase by 10 percent in the number of girls going to school, it states, a country will see an increase of three percent to its GDP (ibid). Again, while girls receiving an education, having a greater choice about if and when to marry and how many children to have, earning more money and having better access to healthcare are all goals the feminist movement has been striving towards for centuries, in the Girl Up discourse – as elsewhere in the girl powering of development (Calkin, 2015c: 658; Cobbett 2014: 310) – they are framed in terms of the economic benefits they will bring for everybody else.

By emphasising how a “simple solution” such as a bike or textbook can lead to change for an entire community, Girl Up advocates challenging gender inequality at an individual level, as consistent with contemporary neoliberal politics. Girls must “work on themselves as an individual project” (Banet-Weiser, 2015: 86), rather than looking to any form of collective organising or structural change to improve their lives. Girl power campaigns present success and wealth as outcomes that automatically follow when a girl receives an investment and makes the ‘right’ choices (Bent, 2013: 12). The Girl Up discourse is silent on the role of boys, men and women in creating unjust circumstances for girls and on the structural causes of poverty that mean some parents must choose which of their children to send to school. It also remains silent on the global power relations that mean that for many children in the Global South, an education based on “Western models of knowledge transmission” is the only hope of securing a well-paid job in their community (Khoja-Moolji, 2015a: 98). Rather than aiming to dismantle the many hurdles facing girls in the Global South – and North – to accessing education, Girl Up advocates supplying them with individual solutions to overcome these hurdles.

For example, a fact sheet about Ethiopia on the Girl Up website explains that girls – unlike their male peers – are expected to do household chores, which stop them from studying and make them fall behind in school. In response, it states, “the [Girl Up-funded] program also supplies lanterns so girls can study after the sun goes down” (Girl Up, nd e). Such an approach does nothing to address the unfair distribution of domestic labour and provides a solution that places the onus on girls to work longer hours, into the evening. Just like the bike to pedal away from potential harassers, this does not solve the girl’s problems, but rather provides her with a means of coping with them.

Similarly, an email campaign in May 2017 urged supporters to gift a garden to a girl in Guatemala instead of buying their mother flowers for Mother’s Day that year:

Girls in some of the poorest regions of Guatemala are smashing the patriarchy by building their own gardens and selling produce, becoming entrepreneurs to improve

their own lives. A garden means access to proper nutrition and the ability to earn an income by selling produce. It symbolises autonomy. (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017i)

The language of the email appropriates feminist imagery about “smashing the patriarchy,” whilst advocating a solution to poverty and malnutrition that does nothing to address structural, patriarchal discrimination. Behind the simplistic narrative of girls gaining greater control over their lives and being better nourished is a solution to inequality that would not be deemed appropriate for girls of the North: autonomy. In the North, initiatives to promote ‘autonomy’ amongst girls by enabling them to grow their own food, earn an income and become independent of adults would be deemed irresponsible or even illegal. The acceptability of such proposals in relation to Guatemala relies on assumptions about the inability of the Southern government, Southern male or Southern parent to care for those girls. In this discourse, the Southern girl must be given autonomy from Southern states and Southern men, who are assumed to be part of the problem. The implicit opposite is the North, where states and men have long understood how to provide the solutions to such issues. As if to highlight this discursive divide, the “Campaign Associate” sending the email writes: “To me, a garden was a fun activity I did with my Mom growing up, but for these girls a garden has a much greater impact,” which includes “preventing child marriage” through training in entrepreneurship skills, “promoting gender equality” by taking on work that is usually reserved for men and “improving nutrition” by encouraging girls to make healthy eating choices (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017j). Unlike in the North where girls can relax and have fun with their mothers, the discourse invites us to assume that in Guatemala girls must take individual responsibility for looking after themselves, running a business, challenging gender roles in their community and therefore ultimately “smashing the patriarchy.” It is typical of a discourse that sees girls – with the help of a simple investment in their education – as responsible for changing the world.

Girls’ Sexuality and Risk

Girl power discourses in development place further responsibility on the shoulders of girls in their depiction of girlhood, and especially girls’ sexuality, as inherently risky. Campaigns such as Girl Up

stress the risks that early marriage, pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses pose not only to a girl herself, but to the wider society and economy. One example of this is in the following poem by Khadijah, a schoolgirl from Malawi who was given a bike by Girl Up so that she “no longer has to walk 18 miles to school”:

My world, my people
Give me love, give me hope
Give me happiness and not sadness
Give me radiance and not pregnancy
[...]
Give me courage and not marriage
Give me English and not syphilis
Give me education and not suffocation.
(Girl Up, nd c: 3 & 9)

The poem, which occupies an entire page of the 32-page Girl Up five-year impact report, alongside a photograph of Khadijah, sets up various states in binary opposition to one another. On the one hand, a girl can have happiness, radiance, courage, English and education, or on the other, she can have sadness, pregnancy, marriage, syphilis and suffocation. What is interesting here is that Girl Up communications staff decided to give this poem such prominence in a published report on their website. The poem combines conservative discourses about sexuality in Malawi with a girl power message about the potential for an individual girl, if given an education and taught English, to avoid the possible ill effects of girls’ sexuality.

This combination is equally visible in Girl Up’s images of its programmes in Liberia (downloaded from Girl Up, nd f). The images show girls presenting their work to their class, presumably intended to be interpreted as a sign of their increasing self-belief after participating in a Girl Up-funded programme. Looking on are a teacher and a Girl Up staff member, wearing a t-shirt branded with the campaign logo. Behind the girls on the wall of the classroom are a series of educational posters, including one that reads “If you must have sex, use condoms to prevent HIV.” While these do not seem to be Girl Up posters specifically, neither do they seem out of place in these images, given the emphasis in Girl Up programmes on the costs to society of early marriage,

teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted illnesses. The tone of the message contains an implicit judgement of those girls who “must have sex,” suggesting that they are unable or unwilling to control themselves. Once again, it places all the responsibility for “managing” her sexuality on the shoulders of an adolescent girl. This is far from an emancipatory tone, instead placing the emphasis on teaching girls to “discipline and manage the self” (Calkin, 2015b: 623) with the aim of reducing population growth and the transmission of illnesses such as HIV (e.g. Hayhurst, 2013: 7.3; Moeller, 2013: 617). By advocating a solution to such problems that focuses on girls themselves, not on the boys and men who are their potential sexual partners, husbands or abusers, these campaigns place girls in the position of sexual gatekeepers who much refuse boys’ or men’s advances and delay engaging in sexual intercourse until after they have completed schooling and entered the workplace (Ringrose and Renold, 2012: 341; Ringrose, 2013: 93). These campaigns ignore the many girls who have little control over their sexuality. Furthermore, they remain silent on the fact that some girls may wish to engage in a happy and fulfilling sex life during their adolescence and that in order to do so, they have the right to access reproductive health information and treatment. In this sense, supposedly empowering messages about girls’ potential and about their ‘choices’ to delay motherhood may actually feed into conservative and patriarchal norms that see girls as needing to abstain from sex until married to a suitable partner (Chant, 2016b: 319; Grant, 2012: 74). While a girl’s own culture may see her sexual activity during school or before marriage as risking her and her family’s reputation, campaigns such as Girl Up portray it as risking the investment that has been made in her education.

The Spectacularisation of Girlhood

The Girl Up discourse also places pressure on girls in the Global North to think and act in certain ways through its reproduction of spectacular discourses about girls. Girl Up resources claim to be creating the “next generation of American girl leaders, who are set apart by [their] sense of purpose and social responsibility” (Girl Up, nd g). The most spectacular of all Girl Up members are the Teen Advisors, a “highly selective group of girls” who help to advise Girl Up staff (Girl Up, nd g).

Descriptions in Girl Up resources of present and former Teen Advisors list a range of spectacular achievements by girls who have the promise to change the world all by themselves (Bent, 2016: 107; Projansky, 2014: 1). One of the current Teen Advisors, we are told, is “already an advocacy all-star,” having met with state legislators at the age of 14 to discuss women’s health, while another is “an aspiring actress, having already appeared in film, television and commercials” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017n). The five-year report includes stories about girls who have achieved incredible things, from cycling across the US at the age of 16, to introducing Michelle Obama at the Girl Up Leadership Summit (Girl Up, nd c: 3). It features interviews with past Teen Advisors, who explain what they have achieved since completing the programme. One states that she has opened a vocational training centre for women in India and “was recently honoured as the Harvard Women’s Centre Woman of the Week,” another is currently “working with a team at MIT to evaluate emerging technologies for electrification in Liberia” and one represented Girl Up at a UN summit in Moscow (ibid: 16-17). Each interview is accompanied by a glossy photograph of a girl who is slim, happy, attractive yet not sexualised, either looking directly at the camera or to one side with a sense of purpose.

While these girls’ achievements are worthy of recognition, Girl Up’s spectacular portrayal of girlhood is unattainable to the majority of girls, whether in the US or elsewhere. These girls’ stories are presented without any reference to the circumstances, communities and adults that will have contributed to their success, presenting it as the product of spectacular ability and hard work. It has nothing to say about the girls who lack the educational opportunities or grades to get into Harvard or MIT, who do not have access to the facilities and support necessary to train for a cycle ride of thousands of miles or whose requests to speak to their congresswoman or man go unanswered. While stories of girls achieving great things may be a welcome change from historically passive portrayals of girlhood, spectacular girlhoods are framed in a way that discourages girls from seeking solidarity with others and that emphasises a neoliberal model of empowerment as a result of individual ability and choices. The danger is that the many girls who do not achieve such spectacular

feats will be left feeling that they themselves are to blame for this 'failure.' For those girls, this discourse could be anything but empowering.

Furthermore, the discourse is silent on the possibility for a Southern girl to be spectacular. This matters not only for the representation it produces of Northern and Southern girls, but also because as a campaign offering opportunities to girls, such a discursive construction also shapes the opportunities that are offered to them. As is discussed in the following section, discursive constructions of Northern and Southern girls and what they can achieve very much shape the opportunities they have to take part in a campaign like Girl Up.

Oppositional Girlhoods

The Girl Up campaign positions girls in the Global North and South in opposing subject positions to one another; girlhood in the North is characterised by supposed gender equality and opportunity, while girlhood in the South is characterised by oppression and constraint (Bent and Switzer, 2016: 123). The portrayal of Southern girlhood in Girl Up resources is bleak. A fundraising email about refugee girls in Uganda sent in December 2016 titled "A Girl Like Diana Needs your Help," states that Diana

feels hopeless about her future. She fears that if she doesn't receive a scholarship for secondary school, her parents will force her to drop out and get married to supplement their income. Her older sister got married at 17 so the family could use the dowry. (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016a)

In a factsheet about Malawi, readers are informed that "Tradition and economic realities force many girls to drop out of school in order to marry, bringing health risks like complications from adolescent pregnancy and increased likelihood of HIV infection" (downloaded from Girl Up, nd f). The factsheet on Ethiopia provides a similar picture, informing readers that:

Girls in Ethiopia face challenges such as lack of access to education and health risks including high rates of maternal death and HIV infection. In rural areas, girls spend hours fetching water each day as well as completing household tasks, leaving little or no time for school. (Girl Up, nd f)

Each of the factsheets for the various countries in the Global South lists statistics about a lack of basic rights, forced marriage, violence, adolescent pregnancy and HIV. Girls in the South are depicted as powerless, voiceless and helpless. They face “risks,” “challenges” and “complications,” which “force” them to drop out of school.

In the case of Malawi, “tradition” is invoked as a cause of gender inequality, without any contextual information to establish which traditions are to blame or how they prevent girls from going to school. Indeed, precolonial Malawi was a territory made up of multiple different tribes, cultures and languages, with several of the tribes being matrilineal and ruled by female chiefs (Grant et al., 2013: 268; McCracken, 2013: 59-60; Peters, 2010: 184; Phiri, 1983: 258-9). Scottish missionaries saw matriliney as inefficient for farming, thinking men would not work hard on land they did not own, and so preached obedience to men (Kaler, 2001: 531; Segal, 2008: 18). The “tradition” of preventing girls from getting an education in Malawi in fact dates back to the actions of those same missionaries, who largely excluded women from learning in their newly created schools (Kamwendo, 2014: 80; Kendall, 2007: 285; McCracken, 2013: 113). Similarly, the “economic realities” that force girls out of school in Malawi have been heavily influenced by intervention from the Global North, whether through the restructuring of the Malawian economy in the colonial era or through the adoption of a Structural Adjustment Plan in the 1980s, under the advice of the World Bank, which saw negative growth in GDP in some years and a decrease year on year in the number of children attending primary school (Kadzamira and Rose, 2003; Rose, 2003: 7 & 68). In the Girl Up discourse, as more widely in girl power discourses in development, Northern intervention is the solution to, rather than an underlying cause of, girls’ lack of opportunities in the Global South, which are instead portrayed as the result of “traditional” and outdated norms.

In contrast to this bleak assessment of the situation of Southern girls, Northern girls are implored, “If you’re feeling helpless about the state of the world, don’t doubt your power” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017f). They are urged to pay fees (\$119 if they sign up early) to attend a

Leadership Summit “that will give you the inspiration, know-how, network and tools you need to be the change that the world needs!” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017g), or to apply to become one of the “diverse” and “global” group of Teen Advisors, “representing Canada, Hong Kong, Mexico and 14 different U.S. states” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017n). As one former Teen Advisor explains, it is a role that “taught me that I have the power to make a difference and that my voice is enough” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017d). These emails must convince the Northern girl that she has the power to change another girl’s situation, so that they can then implore her to do so immediately, posing questions such as, “What are you waiting for?” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017k) or telling her, “Thank you for making today count” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017g). Girls in the North are assumed to have power, money and resources to hand, while girls in the South are assumed to be able to do nothing about the discrimination that they face. While Diana in Uganda is “hopeless” because of her “fear” she will be “[forced]” to drop out of school and marry, if a Northern girl feels “helpless” about something as vast as the “state of the world,” she is urged not to doubt that she has the “power” to change it. Northern girls are linked with “power,” “inspiration,” “know-how,” “network” and having a “voice.”

Statistics about the issues facing girls in the Global South are framed in Girl Up materials as if they are *only* a concern for girls there. For example, the Liberia factsheet states that “Rape is the most frequently reported crime” in the country and that “girls ages 10-14 are the most frequent victims” (downloaded from Girl Up, nd f). Rape statistics are notoriously difficult to compile, and it is impossible to verify the reliability of these particular statistics as the source website given no longer exists. However, it is interesting that a 2011 summary of data on violence against women compiled by UN Women found that the lifetime incidence of sexual violence against women in Liberia was 17.6 percent, while the lifetime incidence of sexual violence against women in the United States was also 17.6 percent (UN Women, 2011). Even the UN’s data would suggest that the world cannot simply be divided into Northern saviours and Southern victims in a way that this UN Foundation campaign seems to do. Yet Girl Up remains silent on the many ways in which girls in the US, and

elsewhere in the North, might face violence, discrimination and hardship, as well as the ways that girls in the South might have power and agency.



Figure 4: Table taken from Girl Up's five-year impact report (Girl Up, nd c)

As if to illustrate this oppositional view of girlhoods, Figure 4 shows the campaign's aims to empower girls in both categories of "the beneficiaries of the work and our advocates doing the work" (Girl Up, nd c: 7). While in the Global South, they aim to ensure that girls are "educated, healthy, safe, counted, given leadership opportunities," in the North they empower their members through "advocacy, fundraising, education, service, community" (ibid). The two lists are placed on either side of the Girl Up logo, as if to highlight that they address different needs and circumstances, which do not overlap. Thanks to this logic, although many girls in the US – as shown in UN Women statistics – might need help in staying safe, they will be offered the opportunity to fundraise for safety programmes for girls in Liberia. Conversely, the opportunities available to Northern Girl Up members are not seen as relevant to girls in the South. I observed this during my fieldwork in Malawi, as members of both clubs – as far as I am aware, the only two clubs in Malawi at that time – had applied to attend a Girl Up STEAM [Science, Technology and Maths] camp that was being held in Malawi that summer. This "one-of-a-kind experience," which would help girls to "enhance your STEAM skills, develop your leadership potential and help build networks that will propel you to new opportunities in the STEAM fields" was open to girls aged 15-18 who are citizens of the US, Malawi, Liberia, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda or Zambia (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2107c). Girls from the club in the township, which was a vibrant and active Girl Up club, applied to attend and were all turned

down. By contrast, a girl from the international school who was not a citizen of any of the eligible countries and who had only joined Girl Up so she could apply for the camp told me she was accepted to attend. This is perhaps because her CV had more examples of the “leadership potential” and “STEAM skills” that the camp hoped to enhance, given the opportunities and facilities she had available to her at the international school compared to the girls in the township, who had never set foot inside a scientific laboratory. In many ways, then, the discourse of oppositional girlhoods can be seen in the resources coming out of Girl Up and it can be seen to shape the opportunities to take part in Girl Up that differently located girls are offered.

Connecting the Dots and the “Girlafesto”

The Girl Up promotional video entitled *Connecting the Dots*¹⁷ exemplifies the above analysis of the Girl Up discourse. Added to YouTube by the UN Foundation in 2010, it was created before Girl Up was open to members outside of the US (UN Foundation, 2010b). However, it is still listed as a current video in the resources section of the Girl Up website (last checked in May 2019). The simple, black and white animation begins by asking the viewer to imagine that they are twelve again. The rest of her life, a female voiceover actor with a US accent tells us, will play out as follows: getting “decent grades,” finding friends, making good decisions about boys, going to college, getting a job, buying shoes, falling in love and planning for the future. It is a safe narrative in which the girl’s only minor mistake is when the narrator’s claim that the girl “makes good decisions about boys” is accompanied by a drawing of a boy in glasses, trousers, shirt, tie and knitted pullover, and the qualification “well, mostly.” We are intended to interpret this as meaning this boy is too geeky for our spectacular viewer and the boy’s shrug and proclamation of “hey” suggests he is offended by the insinuation. Otherwise, however, she is succeeding in a lifetime of achievement and consumption. A pile of bank notes increases in size as she gets a job and then morphs into some sparkling shoes.

¹⁷ A complete storyboard of the video is shown in Appendix 3.

Her future love holds the hand of her adult self, while thought bubbles from both are united into an image of a swaddled baby.

The voiceover tells us to rewind again. A globe appears and spins around the girl, as we are told that she is twelve again, “but this time you’re one of the eighty-five percent of all the world’s adolescents with a lot fewer options.” As the globe disappears, our spectacular girl in jeans, a t-shirt with a heart design and a pony tail has become a girl in a full-length printed skirt and plain t-shirt, with her hair down past her shoulders. For this girl, we are told, school is “out of the question” because she must work. A building that represents school disappears as the Southern girl sweeps the floor. Whereas the Northern girl’s future, adult self held hands with a well-dressed man of a similar height to her, we are told that the Southern girl is forced to marry at the age of 13, as a much taller man appears next to her with loose fitting clothes, visible stubble and a scowl on his face. The narrator informs us that he isn’t faithful to her, at which point “HIV+” is stamped onto the girl in bold, black letters. By the next image, aged 20, the ‘girl’ has four children. As the animation simulates paper being torn either side of her, the girl is left alone in darkness. We zoom out from the darkness to find that she is just one black dot on a map in which the Global South has been covered in black dots, while the narrator explains, “now multiply that by the six hundred million adolescent girls in developing countries.” The point is to show that “our world is a turning point” and that if only there was a way to invest in all of these millions of girls, then the whole world will be better off. A coin spins in the air as a video tells us that “When you connect the dots you start to improve the options for girls around the world” (ibid).

We are asked to rewind again. This time the twelve-year-old Southern girl is given an education in a school with a UN flag. A wad of cash, a mortarboard, a sheep, a stethoscope and a sewing machine float above her. The voiceover informs us she has better healthcare (she takes the stethoscope) and a small loan to start a business (she takes the sewing machine). The result, accompanied by real-life videos of smiling, happy girls in unspecified Southern locations, is “a better

future for herself, her family, her community and her world.” The viewer can make this happen by clicking on the Girl Up website, so, the video asks, “What are you waiting for?” In just under two minutes, *Connecting the Dots* establishes Northern girlhoods as characterised by success, opportunity, delayed childrearing and consumption while it establishes Southern girlhoods as characterised by poverty, disease and early marriage; it makes a sweeping claim about hundreds of millions of girls in the South, reducing a map of the world to countries covered in black dots and those left white; it sets up the Northern girl as the saviour-in-waiting of the Southern girl; and it proposes a solution – a sewing machine – to poverty and abuse that would never be deemed appropriate for a girl in the North because a Northern girl would not be required to sew her way out of poverty.

While much less explicit in constructing this North-South divide, the Girlafesto poster, serves a similar purpose. The text reads as follows:

I AM A GIRL. bright, able, outspoken, soft-spoken, serious, spirited, adventurous, curious and strong. i am me. i follow. i lead. i learn. i teach. i change my clothes, my hair, my music and my mind. i have a voice that speaks, ideas to stand on and a world to step up to. i matter. and so does she. she may look different and talk different, but she is like me. SHE IS A GIRL. And together, we will rise up. Because while we are strong, together we are stronger. And together, our voices will change the world. You see a girl. WE SEE THE FUTURE. (Girl Up, nd f)

Just as *Connecting the Dots* claims to be about connecting girls, the Girlafesto emphasises what girls can do together. For a campaign that focuses on individual girls and their (possible) achievements, the language of being stronger together in the Girlafesto has a remarkable emphasis on solidarity and collective action (Magno and Kirk, 2008: 360). However, even while it is stressing unity amongst girls, the poster also serves to highlight their differences. The girl in the US speaks in the first person and is linked to positive qualities, including her various skills and attitudes, her strength and the choices she has available to her. She has ideas, a platform and a “world to step up to.” By contrast, the ‘other’ girl – in the context of the Girl Up discourse the reader is invited to assume that this is the Southern girl – is spoken about in the third person. Although we are told she is “just like me,” the

only information we have about her is that she looks and talks “different.” This difference encourages the reader to question whether this girl can also do the things the Northern girl does. Can she change her clothes? Does she have a voice that speaks? Her subject positioning here is as the ‘other’ to the girl in the North; she is spoken about but does not speak for herself. While the Northern girl already has a “voice” and a “world to step up to,” it is only after the Southern girl comes to her Northern counterpart’s attention and after they join their voices “together” that she will be able to “change the world.”

Both resources stress the role of Girl Up in “connecting” Northern and Southern girls, of helping them to come “together,” while they simultaneously reproduce and reinforce discursive constructions that see them as irreconcilably opposed. They split the world into countries where girls wear jeans and buy shoes, go to school and have careers and use their voices to represent themselves in the first person and countries where girls wear long skirts and live in poverty, are married and in poor health and passively await rescue. While it is much subtler in the *Girlafesto* than in *Connecting the Dots*, the discourse nonetheless invites us to make assumptions about the Southern girl’s life, the options available to her and her abilities without giving us any contextual information. They exemplify the Girl Up discourse and its reproduction of oppositional girlhoods. In the following section, however, I analyse a small number of Girl Up materials that suggest that this discourse can be, and frequently is, disrupted. As discussed in Chapter 4, one strategy that I have adopted in my analysis of the Girl Up campaign is to “read against the grain,” that is “tracing that which [evades] the dominant discourse” (Khoja-Moolji, 2016: 753). The analysis in the following section reveals that sometimes official Girl Up materials themselves evade dominant girl power discourses in development, especially when they feature the voices and opinions of Girl Up members themselves.

Reading ‘against the Grain’: Searching for Subversion

Scholars have frequently critiqued the depoliticisation of global and gender inequalities in the girl powering of development (Calkin, 2015a: 302; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 159; Roberts, 2015: 222; Switzer, 2013: 347) and this is one area where Girl Up differs from other campaigns in its calls to girls to take political action. Indeed, one of the actions it encourages girls to take up is “advocacy” and it frequently calls for members in the US to write to their senator asking them to support a bill in favour of girls’ rights. This resonates with the UN Foundation’s origins as an organisation aimed at building support amongst US publics and the US government for the work of the UN. One example of this lobbying was a campaign in late 2017 to get a bill protecting the access of girls in vulnerable settings, such as refugee camps, to education through the senate (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017b). Writing a letter to their senator was one of the suggested actions that club members take for International Day of the Girl. And while it did not comment on the outcome of the election, Girl Up emailed its supporters in mid-February 2017, shortly after the inauguration of President Trump, stating that “we are choosing unity, inclusiveness and compassion over the negative and divisive rhetoric that’s on our TVs and in our newsfeeds” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017f).

There are of course many political issues that Girl Up remains silent on. For example, the email stops short of naming those whom Girl Up see as responsible for this negative and divisive rhetoric. Neither does Girl Up encourage girls to lobby their politicians about all girls’ rights issue. There was no email to supporters, for example, about the Trump administration’s ban on aid spending for organisations that provide, or provide information about, abortions, which came into effect during the time period in question. Feminists have argued that recent instrumentalist approaches to gender and development frequently neglect basic rights such as access to sexual and reproductive healthcare (Esquivel, 2016: 12; Gabizon, 2016: 107; Koffman and Gill, 2013: 95; Razavi, 2016: 30; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016: 78; Wendoh, 2013). These rights are also neglected in the Girl Up discourse, despite their clear relevance to the campaign and its claims about the benefits of

girls delaying motherhood. The discourse is also silent on the role of the global political economy in creating and reinforcing inequalities between countries, meaning that some girls are refugees with no education while others are called upon to donate. Included in this is a silence about the role of transnational corporations (TNCs) in that economy, like for example Caterpillar, Girl Up's "strategic partner" (Girl Up, nd h), who have been the target of criticism and calls for boycott by two separate UN Special Rapporteurs because of their continuing sale of equipment used by the Israeli Defence Forces to destroy buildings – including schools – and land in the occupied Palestinian territories (United Nations, 2012; War on Want, 2005: 7). However, Girl Up does encourage its members to demand that their government take its responsibilities towards refugees seriously. In doing so, it encourages American girls to take an interest in the politics of their country before they are old enough to vote, giving them experience of petitioning and campaigning on women's issues. While Girl Up certainly does little to address the underlying structural causes of global inequality, it differs from other campaigns in acknowledging that there are political causes to some of the issues facing girls that cannot be solved by private citizens making charitable donations alone.

Despite its reproduction of Northern saviour and Southern victim depictions of girlhoods, Girl Up does also encourage girls in the Global North to undertake a form of "service" in their *own* communities. For example, for International Day of the Girl one of the suggested activities that girls might decide to take up was helping at a local shelter for women, serving meals or helping to provide childcare, urging them to "make sure to find out their volunteer requirements and sign up well in advance!" (Girl Up, 2017a). Again, while this approach does not go as far as challenging the "oppositional girlhoods" discourse entirely, because it still assumes that Girl Up members are themselves empowered and equipped with everything they need to help others, it does recognise the need for action on gender inequality in the US.

Girl Up claims to be a movement "by girls, for girls" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017n) and while it is clearly still an organisation run by adult staff according to the UN Foundation's priorities, I

did encounter some evidence of girls influencing the Girl Up discourse. For example, in a feature for the 2017 International Day of the Girl, the campaign surveyed members about their favourite feminist books, films and idols and published a link to the results on the front page of the Girl Up site (Girl Up, 2017b). When asked what they felt the biggest global issues for girls were, although “access to education” was the most popular choice, over half of respondents opted for other issues including the gender pay gap, climate change and political representation (see Figure 5). When asked about organisations they like to follow on Instagram, the list of responses included an account called “Muslim Girl” (@MuslimGirl) and another account called Intersectional Feminist (@Feministastic). While the list of “Top Feminist Reads” featured some predictable entries, such as the autobiographies of Malala Yousafzai and Hillary Clinton, it also included *Women, Race & Class* by Angela Davis, *La Casa en Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros and *We Should All Be Feminists* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. As Marshall and Sensoy identify, in the post-9/11 context, there was a fashion in the US for stories about Southern girls – especially in Muslim contexts – that construct them as “vulnerable, naïve, ignorant, uncivilised and in need of rescue from the efforts, good will and knowledge of educated, modern, civilised and *benevolent* subjects located in the (civilised) West” (2010: 298, emphasis in the original). There are plenty of examples of books such as these, written largely by those from the Global North, that could have dominated this list. Yet the girls’ list instead features, amongst others, a Pakistani activist, a Mexican-American author and a Nigerian author and lecturer whose previous activism includes TED talks about the dangers of telling a “single story” about the African continent and about why we should all be feminists (Adichie, 2009; Adichie, 2013).

When the girls were asked who their “#GIRLHERO” was, the responses included Michelle Obama, Ruth Bader Ginsburg (an Associate Justice of the US Supreme Court) and Frida Kahlo, the Mexican artist, communist and icon of the feminist and LGBTQ movements. The list of the girls’ favourite feminist movies included *Persepolis*, the adaptation of Marjane Satrapi’s graphic novel about coming to Germany as a teenage refugee from Iran. Finally, when asked who the

“#GIRLHERO” in their life was, the quotes given talk about teachers, sisters and advisors who have inspired or supported the girls. While spectacular discourses “[erase] the socio-cultural and geopolitical systems that make girls’ exceptionality possible” (Bent, 2016: 108), these girls are keen to acknowledge the support they have received from their peers or from adult women. The girls’ choices represent a diverse array of Northern and Southern perspectives, with an emphasis also on the experience of Southerners migrating to the North, they are at times overtly political and feminist and they celebrate the women who make it possible for girls to take action. They often directly counter the girl power discourses in international development. Yet, thanks to a survey of its own members, for a brief period surrounding International Day of the Girl they featured on the front page of the Girl Up website.



Figure 5: Graphic on "Issues that Matter to Girls," taken from Girl Up (2017c)

There are several possible explanations for the apparent willingness of Girl Up staff to publish content that is so different from the tone of their usual publications. The first is that they did not foresee that girls’ responses to the survey would differ so much from the dominant discourse. Yet once they had conducted the survey, the ethos of “by girls, for girls” compelled them

to publish the results. However, this does not explain why the results were featured so prominently on the Girl Up website. Chant and Sweetman's description of feminists working in development institutions offers another possible explanation: "many of them would prefer to use more radical and transformative messaging but recognise that they are engaging with politically and socially conservative institutions which need to be involved on their own terms" (2012: 526). It could be that Girl Up staff are keen to promote a more radical feminist position but must work within the constraints placed upon them by the UN Foundation, the wider United Nations or even the campaign's corporate sponsors. Reading against the grain, the space given to girls' political and intersectional views on the Girl Up website suggests that Girl Up staff and members find ways to disrupt, or even shape, the Girl Up discourse from within the campaign.

Conclusions

My analysis in this chapter paints a more complex picture of the official Girl Up discourse than the literature might suggest. The majority of the Girl Up resources and emails analysed reproduce girl power discourses identified in the literature, including an instrumentalist vision of girls' empowerment that focuses on basic education and entry into the labour market and the supposed benefits that these interventions will bring for economies, a conceptualisation of girlhood and girls' sexuality as inherently risky, spectacular discourses of individual girls' achievements devoid of parental or community support and the placing of girls in the Global North and South in opposing subject positions to one another. However, feminist staff members and Girl Up club members find ways to occasionally shape the discourse in more radical ways, from encouraging girls to take an interest in politics and lobby their government or take up some kind of voluntary work in their own communities, to publishing recommendations on intersectional feminist literature to read. There remain silences in the Girl Up discourse, not only in terms of global economic structures that limit the opportunities available to girls in different countries, but also in terms of the political activism and agency of girls in the Global South. However, the analysis hints at the prevalence of feminist

staff within the campaign and of their attempts at encouraging girls to pursue their own, more radical forms of activism as part of the campaign. This is the focus of the remainder of this thesis, which explores the creative and political ways the girls adapted the campaign to fit their own vision of girls' empowerment.

Chapter 6 – Girls’ Readings of Girl Up Marketing Materials

In this chapter, I argue that Girl Up club members interpret the marketing materials discussed in the previous chapter in new and interesting ways, at times embracing girl power discourses and at others openly rejecting their representation of Northern and Southern girlhoods. In analysing the girls’ responses in the focus groups to the Girl Up materials I showed them, I draw on the work of feminist audience reception scholars and of Stuart Hall, as outlined in Chapter 3. In particular, I focus on the three positions Hall identifies from which “decodings” of a text may take place: dominant, negotiated and oppositional (1980: 136-138). In a dominant reading, the viewer or reader decodes the message of a media text within the same terms of reference in which it was encoded. A negotiated reading largely adopts the terms of reference of the text but finds exceptions to it based on local context. An oppositional reading is when a reader decodes a text in a “*globally* contrary way” (1980: 137-8, emphasis in original). Over the following sections of this chapter, I explore the girls’ reactions to Girl Up materials. I argue that they never reproduced the Girl Up discourse uncritically, nor did they ever adopt a globally contrary stance towards it. Instead, theirs was a negotiated reading. However, there were some representations within the discourse that they were quicker to question than others and I have structured the analysis in this chapter into three sections, starting with their least critical and building towards their most critical readings.

My choice to devote a chapter of this thesis to analysing girls’ readings of Girl Up materials was complicated by the fact that almost none of the girls in any of the six schools had previously encountered the “Girlafesto” poster and *Connecting the Dots* video that I used as prompts in the focus groups. The analysis that follows, then, must be read in the context of an immediate response to resources with which the girls were unfamiliar, as opposed to a longer-term negotiation of a discourse. While the girls did at times uncritically embrace some of the representations in the poster and video, the fact that they had not previously taken the time to explore the resources

available on the Girl Up website might explain why these discourses were not reflected in their club activities, as discussed in Chapter 7. In this sense, it would be easy to overstate the power of the materials and the sway they held over the girls' interpretation of participating in Girl Up, when until the point of the focus group, they had never even encountered them. Their reactions are included here, however, because they reveal a great deal about how the girls were able to reflect critically on materials they were seeing for the first time.

Although most of the girls had never seen these resources before, the effect of showing them during the focus group was that many decided to use them to help with their awareness-raising activities in future and the question "can I ask where you got these from?" came up in various forms. After seeing them in the focus groups, the girls in the UK decided to put the Girlafesto posters up around the school during one of their cake sales and played *Connecting the Dots* during some of their awareness-raising assemblies. The girls in New Jersey, whom I met with twice, told me that between our meetings they had held an awareness raising event, during which they had shown "the video that you originally showed us." The focus group may have prompted the groups to construct the subjects in question in ways that they had not done so before. One example of this is when the video prompted the group in New Jersey, whose activities until then had largely focused on discussing gender inequality in the US, to reconsider this emphasis. As Hailey explained:

It made me kind of [...] put in perspective that like, that like yes like it's really important to talk about the issues at home but like at the same time, like it's harder to I guess empathise with girls a thousand miles away, but like we have to like, like understand that that's one of the main focuses too so, I think it really focused it on like the main issue that Girl Up's trying to deal with.

The Girl Up discourse is powerful in that on viewing the video, the girls were persuaded to reconsider their activities as part of the club and to focus more on fundraising for the UN Foundation. It shows the potential for the video to shape the way in which they participate in Girl Up. Yet, had they not participated in the research, they may never have seen it. In the following sections, I argue that even within the context of a focus group that was producing the Girl Up

discourse by exposing the girls to marketing materials they had never seen before, they were still able to read those materials critically and adopt a negotiated stance towards.

“That’s Fierce”: Girls’ Pleasure at Viewing *Connecting the Dots* and the Girlafesto

In some of their initial responses to the video and poster I showed them, the girls seemed to take great pleasure from viewing them. There were representations within them that they embraced, reproduced and saw as “empowering.” As one group in Lilongwe told me, they found it “exciting” to see the resources for the first time. The girls’ reactions to the Girlafesto were mostly very positive and they saw its message as empowering, as demonstrated by the following two extracts from New Jersey and Lilongwe:

Hailey: I like I like when it says outspoken and soft spoken because like [...] it’s like saying like, oh it’s cool you can be however you want like, just be proud that you’re a girl like, like true to you [laughs] however that, whatever that means to you as long as you’re like healthy and empowered

Emily: I also like like the last couple lines it says you see a girl we see a future, like that’s just really like empowering, it’s just like yeah I can do great things it’s just really motivating I guess

[Lines omitted]

Hailey: I don’t know who made this but I think they did another good job of like bringing the Girl Up manifesto but [laughs] girlafesto across, because like the font looks cool it’s like strong language it says I am a girl she is a girl she is like me. I like it.

RW: Yeah.

Mia: I like it.

Madison: I think it’s unifying.

RW: So what do you think about this?

Charmaine: It is like a girl can be able to do anything she wants in life when she is educated, she can be able to do anything [pause] either to teach, or to stand in a group saying some things, she can be able to do anything.

In the first extract, the girls are all agreed that the Girlafesto presents a positive message about girlhood. They accept the girl power motif that girls can be “however you want” and can “do great things” and they see that as an empowering message. As Charmaine asserts in the second extract, “a girl can be able to do anything she wants in life when she is educated.” In doing so, she embraces the girl power narrative that an investment in an education unlocks endless opportunities for a girl in the Global South. For Madison, it is even a document that has a “unifying” effect for girls in different settings. This demonstrates a dominant reading of the Girl Up discourse’s claims to be creating a meaningful link between girls around the world, despite its resources serving to reinforce that divide. Hailey’s laughter as she states the title “Girlafesto” might suggest that she is not entirely convinced by the play on words, but this is unclear. However, these girls generally adopt a dominant reading of the discourses in the text.

The girls felt that the Girlafesto represented a range of different girls and their perspectives. This was interpreted as promoting many possible different ways of being a girl, as the following extract from the UK shows:

Sophie: It’s fierce isn’t it.

Lauren: Yeah.

Daniela: Yeah.

Lauren: But I also like, it’s like they’ve combined the fierce with soft-spoken though

Sophie: Yeah

Lauren: It’s like, what I find is so important is that choice.

Here, Lauren's assertion that the Girlafesto gives girls the "choice" of whether to be outspoken or soft-spoken resonates with neoliberal, postfeminist discourses that see girls as freely choosing in terms of their behaviour and successes, ignoring the way that a girl's position within society might impact on how much she feels able to 'choose' to be outspoken. For example, in Malawi the deeply hierarchical nature of the education system, the high student to teacher ratios (up to 63:1 at primary school level) and the emphasis on rote learning mean that there are very few opportunities even for those girls who are able to access education to be outspoken in school (Maluwa-Banda, 2004: 72). Nevertheless, the girls in all of the settings largely adopted a dominant reading of the message in the text that a girl can achieve anything she wants to, and they saw it as a positive and empowering message for girls in any context.

The girls' initial reaction to the video *Connecting the Dots* was also largely positive. For example, some of them saw its simplistic narrative – something that has frequently been critiqued by scholars researching girl power discourses in development – as one of its strengths. As Hailey explained:

it was simple and that that's a good thing because when you're introducing such a complex topic such a global topic, erm it can be difficult to follow and I think the, the video really, erm was easy to follow and understand.

What is interesting in this quote is that Hailey's assertion that girls' rights are a "complex topic" that is difficult to follow implies that the Girl Up club members themselves understand how complex it is, but feel that for members of the general public, the message needs to be simplified. This is not, therefore, a dominant reading of the video, which would be to feel that it had informed her about an important topic. It could be interpreted as the stance identified by Ang, in which female audiences simultaneously enjoy, but also distance themselves from, a text because of an awareness of possible critiques of it (2006a: 195). Hailey is asserting the need for simplified messages about girls' rights and international development, but also distancing herself from that need.

This is even more evident in the following extract from the UK:

Siobhan: It was really stereotypical, but it really did kind of put it into [perspective

Bethan: [Yeah yeah

Siobhan: Like the [whole kind of

Bethan: [I think the the ste-

Chloe: [I think

Siobhan: Difference

Chloe: Yeah it kinda needed to do that so that it could show like

Siobhan: Yeah

Chloe: The difference but, er

Charlotte: [I think it was

Jessica: [It's a bit basic.

Charlotte: It wasn't as [hard hitting for us

Leah: [[Laughs] Bit basic

Charlotte: Cos we already know

Bethan: Yeah

Charlotte: About what's going on, but I think for people that aren't aware of what's going on

Bethan: Yeah

Charlotte: In these other countries it'd be a really good video for them to see

Chloe: Mm

Charlotte: And see why the movement is needed.

The girls are aware that the video is simplistic to the point of being “stereotypical” and “basic,” but they see this as necessary for people “that aren't aware of what's going on.” Siobhan begins by arguing that the video is “stereotypical,” but this is nonetheless necessary to educate people about the “difference,” by which she presumably means the difference between the lives of the girls in the Global North and South shown in the cartoon. Chloe begins to offer a counter argument to the need for simplicity (“but, er”), but cannot do so before she is interrupted by Jessica and Charlotte. While

Jessica's statement "it's a bit basic" is critical of the video, drawing a laugh of appreciation from Leah, it is Charlotte who takes control of the conversation, bringing it back to a similar argument to Siobhan's about the need for videos of this kind for those who are not informed about the topic. Their reading of the video is not entirely dominant, as will be shown in the following sections, and some of the girls seem more persuaded by this argument than others. However, they do perhaps take a dominant reading of discourses that see simplistic and often undignified portrayals of those in the Global South as necessary and justified in order to raise awareness – or moreover funds – for organisations working there. They did not question the type of intervention enabled by such representations of the South, nor whether they themselves would wish to be portrayed in the way that the Southern girl is in *Connecting the Dots*.

Many of the groups felt that the video was very informative, although few were able to pin down exactly what they had learnt from it. This was particularly evident in the video's use of statistics, if indeed they can be described as such. When the video asks the assumedly US girl to imagine that "you're one of the eighty-five per cent of all the world's adolescents with a lot fewer options," the girl's trousers become a skirt and a globe spins round her, symbolising that she is now somewhere else in the world. Yet very little information has actually been given here about what the video means. Although the animation features girls only, the voiceover refers to "adolescents" as not having options. It does not make clear what options are being discussed and the globe fades out of view before it has stopped spinning, so it is impossible to know where these adolescents are. The viewer is left unsure of what options are being counted, where and by whom. Similarly, when the girl in the Global South has married young, had four children and contracted HIV, the video zooms out to show a map where the Global South is covered in black dots, asking us to "multiply that by the six hundred million adolescent girls in developing countries." The only actual statistics given in the video are that there are six hundred million adolescent girls in "developing countries" and that eighty-five per cent of the world's adolescents can be said to have fewer "options" than the other fifteen percent. With such vague assertions, the viewer must make certain assumptions for

the video's narrative to make sense (Richardson, 2004: 75-6). This did not seem to be an issue for the girls, as shown in the following extracts from New York and the UK:

Nicola: I did not know what's it called, that they said some statistic

Lucia: Yeah

Nicola: And that was really shocking I had no idea that, what was it like eighty percent of girls or something like that, were, it was some crazy statistic and that really opened my eyes I hadn't realised how big that was.

Bethan: I looked at that, I mean I was a bit the statistic about the whole like the eighty-five percent that was I was like oh that's a [bit shocking

Leah: [That's that was really like [I didn't expect it to be that much

Bethan: [But then I thought it was I didn't think [I didn't think it was that much

Leah: [I thought it would be more like less.

The girls' reflections mirror the vagueness of the claims being made in the video. Nicola gets the percentage wrong, while in neither conversation do the girls actually say what it is that eighty-five percent of girls – or adolescents – are supposed to be experiencing. Yet, Nicola still feels that the video “really opened my eyes” and the girls in the UK are shocked – so much so that Bethan and Leah continuously interrupt one another to repeat how unexpected this information was for them.

In the Year 11 group in the UK, Katie remarked about the map of black dots, “I didn't think it happened in like, like the top of Europe d'you know like France and Germany, did it say that? It looked like all of Europe.” Lucy corrects her, saying “It looked southern hemisphere,” although qualifying that comment with “I don't know.” In these cases, despite being very vague on what it is the video is actually saying, the girls nonetheless asserted that it was a good video for raising awareness, “opening eyes” and “shocking” people with the statistics.

Many of the groups of girls in the township of Lilongwe interpreted the *Connecting the Dots* video as teaching them important lessons about how to lead their lives. Interestingly, the video was not encoded with them in mind as viewers, because within the discourses that shape it, they would not be Girl Up club members but would rather be included in the eighty-five percent of adolescents with “fewer options.” However, individuals make sense of discourses by also drawing on the discourses that prevail in their own cultural, educational and institutional context (Morley, 1980: 163) and the girls in Lilongwe did just that. They adopted both a dominant reading of some representations within the Girl Up discourse that emphasise the negative consequences for girls in the Global South who drop out of school, whilst also reproducing dominant, conservative discourses in Malawi that see girls’ sexuality, and pregnancy in particular, as one of the principal factors leading to girls not finishing their education (Grant, 2012: 75; Kamwendo, 2014: 91). I asked the various groups what they thought of the video and some of their responses are below:

Fatsani: I thought I think it’s good encourage us, uh to get be educated girls

Mayamiko: To work hard in school, to achieve their goals.

Pilirani: It’s it’s a good video because it’s like motivating us and telling us [pause] and they are leading us to the right way, like me like to be educated, to have the spirit to learn and be educated.

While the video almost certainly is not directed at them, but rather the Northern girl-fundraiser, the Malawian girls interpreted it as yet another attempt to “lead them to the right way.” The existence of the Girl Up club in the township in Lilongwe complicates girl power discourses on many levels. Whilst challenging local norms that see a boy’s education as a more worthwhile investment than a girl’s, the club also reproduces conservative and religious discourses about girls’ sexuality. Girl Up meetings frequently focused on topics such as working hard in school, staying away from boys and the dangers of prostitution. The girls, therefore, interpret the Girl Up video as portraying the same

message. Indeed, one girl – Yamikani – felt this message so strongly, she even added to the catalogue of negative consequences for the girl in the video who drops out of school:

because of she gets married [pause] her health is not well cos [pause] because of some diseases [...] such as HIV and AIDS [pause] and [pause] she she does not plan how to birth her child [pause] because of that [pause] it, her family [pause] was not health.

Here, neoliberal discourses of girls' individual responsibility to work hard in school in campaigns such as Girl Up resonate with conservative, religious discourses in Malawi about girls' sexuality. In this case, Yamikani reproduces both, to the point of adding an extra detail that is not even mentioned in the video. In Yamikani's interpretation, the girl in the video's decision to marry young is an irresponsible one, as demonstrated by her assumption that this girl does not plan adequately for the birth of her child and as a result risks passing HIV on to them. It is a harsh judgement of the Southern cartoon girl in the video, that resonates deeply with discourses in development that see adolescent girls as responsible for people and consequences far beyond themselves and their own bodies.

Girls Adapting the Girl Up Discourse to Fit their Own Interpretation

At times, the girls' interpretations differed from the preferred meanings of the text yet did not question the logic of it entirely. In the paragraphs below, I discuss three particular examples of the many in which girls moulded the message of the text into their own understandings of the subject in question.

In the Catholic independent school in New York, Gabriella felt that the message of the *Connecting the Dots* video was that neither girls in the Global North or South were able to live their lives without restrictions placed on them because of their gender.

I think both lifestyles have cons like things that weren't really great about them cos like, for like girls like here we have like, our whole life seems to be planned ahead of us that like stage of go to college, get a job, get married, and like it's so hard to veer off from that, cos that, and that's hard to also like be different from everyone else.

But also what they struggle, the girls in other countries struggle through is actually like in getting an education and learning and I think it does show like, while we're very like we're very different we're also very similar.

In this extract, Gabriella does not seem to be criticising the video for portraying a rose-tinted view of Northern girlhood. Rather, she has interpreted the video as portraying Northern girlhood as having its own challenges. The various steps in the US girl's life in the video, including achieving well at school and college, earning money and marrying, are at one point shown as dots connected by a line, presumably meant to signify progression. They are intended to show a life of success and opportunity. And yet it is perhaps this line, with no alternative paths available, that symbolises for Gabriella the feeling that "our whole life seems to be planned ahead of us." Whereas the point of the video is to demonstrate the stark difference between the Northern and Southern girl, in order to motivate the Northern girl to join Girl Up and raise money to change the situation, Gabriella's interpretation of the representation of Northern girlhood as also constrained leads her to conclude that the two girls are in fact "very similar." This is not a direct questioning or criticism of the portrayal in the video and her reading of the portrayal of the Southern girl follows the preferred meaning. However, she has adapted the portrayal of the Northern girl and interpreted it in a way that fits with her own pre-existing concerns about gendered expectations of young people in the US.

At the same school, a further example came when I asked the girls about the "she" referred to in the Girlafesto. Given the campaign's focus on fundraising for girls in the Global South, the preferred meaning here would seem to be that this "she" is referring to the Southern girl. However, at the Catholic independent school in New York, where the girls had a pre-existing women's empowerment club that focused on discussing gender inequality in the US and that they had chosen to register as a Girl Up club as an afterthought, this was not how it was interpreted.

RW: Oh yeah what do you think so when it says like I matter and so does she, who do you think like the she is referring to?

[Pause]

Nicola: Well I was thinking erm, the girlafesto maybe, intersectional feminism just talking about every girl, every woman, whether like cisgendered or transgendered just everyone.

Here, Nicola has interpreted “looking differently and talking differently” to refer to the possible discrimination against trans women and her positive response to the Girlafesto is partly inspired by her interpretation that it is aiming to fight that discrimination. Again, while she does not directly criticise the text, nor question its girl power logic, she does adapt the text to fit with her pre-existing understanding of gender discrimination in the US in all its forms and her desire to challenge it.

Finally, some of the girls in Lilongwe interpreted the message of the video to correspond to the priorities of their Girl Up club. In the video, the Southern girl is shown as marrying, contracting HIV, having children and living in poverty. The US girl spectator is asked to rewind again and imagine that they can change this situation with an investment that keeps the girl in school, meaning she is safe, starts her own business, stays healthy and marries later. Linda, however, interpreted the meaning of the video to be that, “When the girl [pause] she’s, she’s married [...] you can go there and encourage her so that you should, she should go back to school.” Once again, a preferred reading of the video would be almost impossible for Linda because she is not the intended viewer. Instead, therefore, she interprets the message in a way that fits with the activities of her Girl Up club – persuading and enabling married girls to come back to school. While *Connecting the Dots* implies that it is only with an investment from a Northern benefactor *before* this sequence of events begins that a girl can complete her education, Linda’s interpretation is about the importance of reaching out to girls *after* they have already married. Without directly critiquing the bleak assessment of neoliberal development campaigns that a girl who is married and has children is a lost cause, Linda has adapted it into a more hopeful message that girls who are married and have children can still complete their education and achieve their dreams.

In all three of these examples, the girls are not directly criticising the video or questioning its logic and format. However, they do not adopt the preferred meaning of the text, instead adapting it to fit with their previous understandings of the topic and their local contexts. These are three instances where this negotiated reading is particularly clear. In the following section, I consider some of the instances where girls adopted a much more overtly critical stance towards the texts, even if their overall reading of the discourse was still a negotiated one.

Girls Challenging Girl Up's Representation of Girls

The girls were critical of some of the representations in the Girl Up marketing materials. This ranged from expressing frustration at the format used and its effectiveness at conveying messages about girls' rights, to more substantive concerns about the portrayals of girlhood within them. By far the most critical groups were the three groups in the UK school, who criticised both the format and the tone of the materials I showed them. The girls in the US were less persuaded at times by the video's message, although in general they approved of the format used. The resources were initially designed for an audience of only girls in the US, which might explain why certain stylistic features jarred for the girls in the UK but seemed to appeal to the girls in the US. None of the girls in the township school in Malawi criticised the resources. There are many possible reasons for this. The first might be the emphasis on rote learning in the Malawian education system, which leaves little room for practicing critical analysis of media texts. Another might be that almost none of the participating girls in Malawi had access to the internet or to television, meaning they may not be well rehearsed in critically analysing visual media. Finally, it may also be related to the perception amongst some of the girls – despite my best efforts to explain otherwise – that as a white woman from the UK, I was in some way connected to the Girl Up campaign. Either way, none of the following extracts include analyses of instances where girls in that school directly criticised the resources.

The girls in the UK commented almost instantly on various formatting decisions taken by Girl Up in the production of their resources, arguing that they did not come across as resources that should be taken seriously. This was especially true of the Girlafesto, when they commented on the choice of colours and the language used, or even the title itself, a play on the word “manifesto,” which was greeted in two of the three groups with sarcastic laughter. The girls were most critical of the choice not to capitalise the personal pronoun ‘I’ or the first word in each sentence.

RW: So yeah if you just wanna have a little read

[Pause]

Lauren: Oh it’s lower case.

[Laughter]

Bethan: I agree with the message but like they’ve used like a load of capital letters wrong there.

[Laughter]

Bethan: I know that’s

Leah: [Laughs] Or no capital letters.

Chloe: So you agree with the message just not the grammar.

[Laughter]

Bethan: Yeah, yeah basically.

In these two groups, the lack of capitals was raised as an issue. While it was done so more in the context of an annoyance or a distraction, rather than a major issue, it does show a critical awareness of the practices that campaigns such as Girl Up use in marketing aimed at girls and therefore a resistance to the “branding of girlhood” (Gonick et al., 2009: 1). The UK girls frequently complained that adults did not take girls seriously and one possible interpretation of this critique is that their

frustration may not only be at the incorrect grammar, but also at Girl Up's assumption that the use of incorrect grammar would appeal to girls.

Similarly, these same girls were critical of the decision to make the *Connecting the Dots* video a cartoon (the beginning of this extract is also discussed as an example of data analysis in Chapter 4):

Chloe: It said like the eighty-five percent and it made a percentage and it made like that was the shocking part, the percent was the shocking part and I don't think the percent should be the shocking part I think it should be

Leah: That it happens.

Chloe: Like all of it should be the shocking part because it happens and it is on a big scale, but it has to combine to really make a difference.

Charlotte: I think things like that are good though where they put you in the issues cos I know, like what we've been saying if it, unless it happens to white people people don't really care.

Chloe: Yeah.

Charlotte: And that's that's really bad.

Chloe: It is yeah.

[Lines omitted]

Charlotte: But videos like that do help because they they make you

Leah: Mm

Chloe: Think about

Charlotte: Kind of empathise [with it

Chloe: [Yeah

Leah: [Yeah

Charlotte: And pay attention to what's going on.

Leah: I think it would've helped a little bit more if it wasn't a cartoon

Bethan: [Yeah

Chloe: [Yeah

Leah: Because it's a lot less like reality then you think oh yeah [it's and you see yourself as it

Charlotte: [It's easier to ignore it isn't it.

Leah: But at the same time [it's not as

Chloe: [It's not real

Leah: Serious it's not real like in your mind seeing yourself doing that

RW: Mm

Siobhan: Yeah the tone that was used as well it was very light.

Although these same girls had previously argued that the video needed to be stereotypical and simplistic in order to educate people who were unfamiliar with Girl Up and its aims, as the discussion about tone and format continued, they began to critique it. In this extract, they eventually reach an agreement. Chloe and Leah, who previously tried to critique the video but the conversation moved on, now control the conversation and are setting out why they do not like the use of statistics in the video or the use of cartoon imagery. Charlotte, who previously argued it was a "good video" for people to see, does try one more time to argue that videos like this one help make people "kind of empathise with it and pay attention to what's going on." However, she is continuously interrupted by Leah and Chloe. Although they seem to be agreeing with her, they actually move the conversation swiftly back to a critique of the video. Eventually, Charlotte even agrees that the cartoon format makes the message "easier to ignore." Similarly, while Siobhan previously argued that the video put the issues "into perspective," she now argues that the tone is "very light." As discussed in the excerpt analysed in Chapter 4, Charlotte's argument in favour of the video also comes from a negotiated reading of the Girl Up discourse itself, in that she does not see Northern publics as benevolent saviours in waiting, but rather as racist and apathetic, in need of shocking into

helping others. Through their conversation, the girls' consensus has moved to a more critical reading of the Girl Up video and away from the dominant discourse that simplistic narratives help to educate people about complex issues. They agree that the tone of the resources is not serious enough to be taken seriously. Finally, the girls also concluded that the video was "quite American," with Bethan stating that "'if you ask what I've noticed about it it's probably that."

While this is not strictly an oppositional reading because the girls do not read the resources in a globally contrary way (Hall, 1980), these extracts show a critical assessment of the grammar, language, format and tone of the materials, even though they are the materials of a campaign the girls have chosen to be members of and enjoy participating in. Campaigns such as the Girl Effect and Girl Up have been criticised precisely because they reduce complex fights for girls' rights to "multimedia advertising campaigns, in which we are not always sure of what is being sold or to whom" (Calkin, 2015c: 662). However, these quotes from the girls in the UK show that they are very conscious not only of what is being sold (Girl Up) and to whom (girls in the US), but also how (language, use of cartoon imagery, use of statistics etc.).

A frequent critique from both the girls in the UK and the US was about the portrayal of Northern girlhood in the resources I showed them. At the Catholic independent school in New York, Nicola built on Gabriella's earlier point about both lifestyles represented in the video "having cons," although she phrased it more as a criticism: "I think the video was really based off of stereotypes of what both worlds are like, both ends of the spectrum." While Gabriella interpreted the video as showing the challenges facing both Northern and Southern girls, Nicola instead saw Girl Up's preferred meaning of presenting two ends of a spectrum, or opposites, and criticises this as exaggerated or stereotypical. This does not question the logic of the Girl Up discourse entirely, but Nicola is aware that the video may exaggerate certain issues to have a bigger impact on the viewer. Leah explained that Girl Up has "opened my eyes a little bit more to other countries and like how good we've got it here but at the same time, we're still limping a little bit." The girls in the Global

North gave examples of sexual harassment, the gender pay gap, gendered toys for boys and girls, sexualisation in advertising and unequal representation in politics, amongst others, to show that their own communities still had much work to do towards achieving equality.

Several other girls also commented on the Northern girl's supposed "options." In the UK, Lauren said "it was actually quite interesting how even [pause] for the, you know the more, the more liberal one they still grew up to find a husband [...] that there, there was no option for it to be a, for it to be a wife or for them to not grow up and get married." In another UK group, Lucy also commented that "there's still even on the UN video one depiction of a girl and one type of girl." Although the preferred meaning of the video would be that the Northern girl has all the options available to her, while the Southern girl is one of the eighty-five percent of adolescents with "a lot fewer options," the girls did not interpret it this way. They criticised Girl Up for portraying a heteronormative and conservative model of girlhood that aspires to marriage with a man.

Some of the UK club members also questioned the cartoon girl's choices about what to do with the money she has earned thanks to her education and the opportunities available to her:

Chloe: I'm just being a bit picky when it said the shoes I was sort of like oh, she bought shoes, right cool.

[Laughter]

Chloe: [Laughs] Nice one.

Leah: [Laughs] Well done.

Chloe: Yeah

Bethan: Bit stereotypical

Chloe: [Yeah

Leah: [It's like

Bethan: [But other than that I think that's [I mean

Leah: [I got a job I can buy a house no let's buy shoes.

[Laughter]

Here the girls are openly ridiculing the part of the video that suggests that a successful Northern woman earning a good salary will spend her money on sparkling shoes. Just as they laughed sarcastically at the pun “girlafesto,” their comments of “nice one” and “well done” are mocking the video. It is clear that they are frustrated by a portrayal of Northern women as spending their money on fashion rather than Leah’s suggestion of buying a house, symbolising financial security and independence from men.

While some of the girls in the UK mocked the pun “girlafesto,” one group of girls at one of the independent schools in New York had a long discussion about whether replacing the “man” in “manifesto” with “girl” was a good strategy. One girl, Abigail, ended up arguing that “womanifesto” would be more appropriate.

Abigail: The difference between like, a man and a girl, because you know, like girls are like supposed to be younger right [...] I feel like girls sounds kind of less powerful almost cos like not, not because of the gender but because it’s girl and not woman.

Sydney: Yeah

Riley: Tech- so

Sydney: Yeah

Riley: So, you’re saying that like woman seems more powerful than girl.

Abigail: Yeah

Sydney: Yeah [actually

Kaitlyn: [I don’t know.

Abigail: It just [sounds

Kaitlyn: [Girl actually [girl is more powerful

Megan: [Technically it’s not.

Sydney: All the women all the girls are all girls, like

Riley: I think [that

Megan: [I guess like woman is kind of just like a, like a title, kind of like you [Sydney: Yeah]

you could be like considered a woman based on your maturity at like I don't know,

thirteen, but then like

Abigail: But nobody calls men boys [but

Megan: [Also well

Abigail: But people call women girls.

Abigail's suggestion very much splits the group. The conversation is chaotic, jumping from one person to another. While interruptions were a common feature across the focus groups, they were often in the context of supportive comments or agreement as girls tripped over one another to make the same point. Here, however, the girls interrupt each other to disagree ("I don't know": "Technically it's not"). Abigail's critique of the use of "girl" speaks to feminists' wider critiques of girl power discourses, where the choice of the word 'girl' is closely linked to the discursive construction of empowerment, which focuses on aesthetics, consumption and fun, without addressing any of the more 'serious' or 'adult' questions of gender politics (Bent, 2013: 12; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 159; Zaslow, 2009: 5). Abigail's critique hinges on the fact that the document replaces "man" with the term "girl," which is not its equivalent but instead emphasises the youth of Girl Up's members, and so sets itself out as a document that is not to be taken as a serious political statement. Furthermore, she speaks of the tendency for people to use the term "girl" to describe adult women where they would not use "boy" to describe a man. While the group by no means reaches a consensus on this opinion, the lively discussion it sparks suggests a critical engagement with, and reflection on, the way that Girl Up chooses to 'brand' itself.

Conclusions

The examples above demonstrate the many ways the girls interpreted the Girl Up marketing materials. As Natalie Fenton (2000: 738) argues, mass communication needs to be seen as "a

complex interaction of unequal relationships of power, however difficult this may be to translate empirically.” The difficulty in translating this conceptualisation of communication empirically is perhaps evident in my difficulty in separating the analyses into the three sections above. However, an overall pattern emerges in which the girls adopted a negotiated reading of the texts, sometimes taking pleasure in them, sometimes adapting them to their own contexts and sometimes adopting a more critical stance towards them. They never read them in a globally uncritical or contrary way. Rather, they negotiated them with intelligence, sensitivity and wit, at times even directly criticising choices that Girl Up staff must have made when considering how to convey their message to their intended audience (Keller and Ringrose, 2015: 134). They showed a sensitivity not only to what was being said, but also how and to whom.

My purpose in presenting this analysis is not to argue that the Girl Up discourse is not problematic. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is deeply so. It is rather to analyse the agency that girls show in reading these materials. As Jenny Kitzinger (2001: 102) argues, the aim for feminist poststructuralist scholars is research that succeeds in “respecting women’s active engagement with the media without denying questions of power or the possibility of media influence.” There is no doubt that Girl Up, as part of the United Nations Foundation, wields the power to shape discourse and therefore to shape ways of being for girls. However, girls engage with these discourses actively, sometimes adapting them to their own contexts and at other times rejecting them outright. This is visible in their readings of Girl Up materials even as they encounter them for the very first time, as demonstrated in this chapter, and it becomes even more visible in the analysis that follows of their activities as part of their Girl Up clubs and their negotiations of the subject positions the Girl Up discourse makes available to them.

Chapter 7 – Girl Up Members’ Feminist Activism

Despite the critique that girl power discourses in development, and approaches to gender and development more broadly, depoliticise the issue of gender inequality (e.g. Calkin, 2015a: 302; Eyben, 2010: 55; Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 157; Roberts, 2015: 222; Switzer, 2013: 347), I found that Girl Up club members were involved in many different forms of activism, some of it overtly political.¹⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, girls’ participation in politics has frequently been overlooked, partly because they are excluded from formal political structures. However, a small number of scholars have begun to theorise girls’ activism by documenting the many forms of informal feminist politics they engage in, including online activism, standing up to domineering males and mentoring one another (Taft, 2014: 263). All of the girls I spoke to were engaged in activities of this kind even though they were aware that this frequently went beyond the official purpose of a Girl Up club. While the Girl Up discourse mostly focuses on the supposed power of charitable donations – not political activism – to bring about gender equality in the Global South, very few of the Girl Up members I spoke to conducted fundraising for the campaign. Instead, they engaged in various forms of feminist activism. They gave talks to their fellow students with the aim of raising awareness about feminism, supported and mentored other girls, resisted hostility towards Girl Up and engaged in social movement activism both online and at demonstrations.

The girls themselves were keen to downplay the political nature of their activities. As one UK participant told me, “all you have to do is bake a few cupcakes or dress up for the day.” Taft argues, however, that it is precisely this vision of themselves as “selves-in-progress” that allows girls to be “particularly flexible, creative and willing to engage with a variety of different ideas in their activism” (2017: 36). While the girls were keen to stress that they are “only kids” and frequently saw themselves as feminist activists in training, I argue in this chapter that they are already engaged with

¹⁸ Much of the content of this chapter is drawn from an article I published on the findings of this thesis in *Gender and Development* in 2018 (Walters, 2018).

the feminist movement and with politics in their own communities. Their activism sometimes bore little or no resemblance to the official Girl Up campaign and its neoliberal view of girls, opportunities and success. In this chapter, I explore how the girls frequently ignored Girl Up's official purpose of fundraising and instead used their clubs as a means to carry out their own forms of feminist activism, including creating a "safe space" for them and their peers, engaging with the feminist movement and standing up to those in their school community who oppose feminism.

Girls' Negotiation of Girl Up's Primary Purpose as Fundraising Campaign

Although the Girl Up "Club Starter Guide" states that club's activities must "directly benefit the UN programs Girl Up supports" (Girl Up, nd d: 3), very few members I spoke to were engaged in fundraising activities of this kind. According to the guide, clubs must commit to the following responsibilities: hosting at least five activities each year; filing termly reports on their activities; recruiting new members; participating in the 'community' section of the Girl Up website; and fundraising (ibid: 4). Of the six schools I visited, just two had organised events to raise money for the UN Foundation. Even then, they were keen that such events took place within a broader aim of raising awareness about gender inequalities both globally and locally.

Girls in the UK school and one of the fee-paying schools in New York saw fundraising as an important part of the campaign. The latter was the only school where the aim of raising as much money as possible was not problematised by club members. Indeed, one club member – Riley – complained that in the lower school Girl Up club, which she had attended before, there was not enough fundraising: "their Girl Up wasn't helping girls, it was sort of weird, just like talking about like us sort of which, I was like if I can join Girl Up and help people that'd be better." Although it is unclear from this extract exactly what the club activities did include and what Riley means by "talking about us," her reaction shows that to her, the decision by teachers in the lower school not

to fundraise for girls in the Global South was “weird.” This was not something that would “help people.” Higher up in the same school, she had joined the Girl Up club because it did focus on raising money.

Riley and her fellow club members were keen to stress the success of their annual fundraising event, while their teachers boasted of the resourcefulness of their students, who had convinced one of the most expensive restaurants in Brooklyn to donate a meal as a lot for their charity auction evening. While the girls’ achievements were indeed impressive, they had embraced the neoliberal, Girl Up narrative of empowerment that praises Northern girls for their resourcefulness while it ignores the question of whether all girls have such resources so readily available to them. One auction lot was a programme for a hit musical on Broadway – signed by the entire cast – for which one of the club members’ parents had composed the score. While all of these girls were able to tell me in great detail about the auction lots the group had procured, the amount they raised in previous years and the plan for the fundraising dinner, some of them were not as clear on where the money would be going:

Anna: It’s in two weeks actually and it raises a lot of money for Girl Up I [think

Kaitlyn: [Well this year it’s for girls in Uganda

Anna: Yeah

Sydney: Yeah and we’re getting them bicycles so that they can

Kaitlyn: No

Anna: No

Sydney: Oh, we’re not

Kaitlyn: That was last year

Sydney: [That was last year

Megan: [Last year we er got bicycles

Sydney: ‘Kay never mind.

In this school, the girls placed a great deal of importance on explaining what they had achieved in organising the event but never clarified what the money would go towards. In this sense, it is the epitome of “selfie humanitarianism,” where the focus is on the Northern girl and her skills, with little interest in the Southern girl she is purportedly rescuing (Koffman, Orgad and Gill 2015: 161).

In the UK Girl Up club, members were similarly focused on raising as much money as possible, at times at the expense of a sensitivity to the very issues they were fundraising for, as is evident in the group’s lack of consensus over the type of fundraising events they were holding. While they were proud of the money raised so far, their desire to engage people in thought-provoking discussions about issues affecting girls frequently conflicted with their desire to beat the previous year’s fundraising total. This came up many times, as in the following extract, where they are discussing their decision to ask their peers to dress up for Halloween and donate to Girl Up:

RW: So, what was the, was it just a Halloween theme, it was there wasn’t like a [specific
Lauren: [No it wasn’t even a theme, like I was a pink lady [like that’s not
Sophie: [People just
Lauren: Scary it was just dress up [and contribute
Sophie: [I was the devil I was like, [changes tone of voice to impersonate the devil] come to
Girl Up.
[Laughter]

The girls talked about how it had been difficult to link the Halloween theme of the event to the campaign they were fundraising for and in this extract, Sophie changed the tone of her voice to imitate the devil inviting people to Girl Up club, thus cracking a joke about her costume not only having no link to Girl Up, but actually having the potential to scare people off it. They had also held cake sales, but they felt frustrated that students in the school had not stopped to talk to them about Girl Up, instead just buying a cake and leaving.

One event caused a real dilemma for the girls in the UK. In this extract, the girls explain why they did not want to replicate one of the events their predecessors on the Girl Up organising committee had run before:

Bethan: There used to be a boy auction in the school in the drama studio at Christmas [and then

Chloe: [It's like a joke thing

Bethan: It's a joke thing and then [Chloe: Yeah] people would pay to go on dates and then, they said well we'll change round the whole selling people thing and do it with boys, and then some girls wanted to do it too, so it became a date auction, which may have been mildly better I don't know.

[Laughter]

Chloe: I'm not sure we're sending [the right message

Bethan: [It no, no I didn't agree with it [at all.

Leah: [We're raising money to help people who are forced into marriage by [selling people

Chloe: [Selling people off.

[Laughter]

Bethan: Yeah we're not [I don't think we're doing that this year.

Chloe: [So we're gonna change that for this year yeah.

I noted in my fieldwork diary that the girls seemed to be very embarrassed talking about the date auction their predecessors had held, which may explain why they laugh repeatedly in this extract.

When Chloe, the club President, starts talking about "sending the right message," the girls are tripping over each other to point out that auctioning dates with under-18s is not an appropriate way of fundraising for a charity concerned with child marriage. Chloe and Leah both simultaneously describe it as "selling people off" and Bethan and Chloe talk over each other in their eagerness to establish that the event won't be happening this year.

However, when I met the girls for the second time four months later, I was surprised to hear it mentioned as a planned event and questioned them on this turnaround:

Chloe: Oh yeah we could do it for [Valentine's day

Leah: [Cos it was a boy cos it was like they sell like dates and stuff

Chloe: Yeah

[Pause]

RW: What's the logic behind that then?

Chloe: Erm, it's not strong I'm gonna be honest.

[Laughter]

Charlotte: I don't really like it, [but it's a good way

Chloe: [No I don't like it.

Charlotte: To raise money.

Chloe: Yeah, it's a good way to raise money. Er that's kind of it.

RW: OK, cos I think last time you talked quite a while about how last year did that

Leah: Yeah

RW: And did a [date auction

Chloe: [But we're

RW: And you weren't going to

Chloe: Well [we

Leah: [Yeah

Chloe: Looked at like it's probably a bad message, but see we're bringing in the feminism as they're, we're, dating, we're auctioning off dates with boys and girls

[Laughter]

Chloe: So, there we [goooo

Charlotte: [[Laughs] Equality yes.

Chloe, the club President, is much less sure of herself in this extract, frequently pausing or failing to finish a sentence. She admits that the logic behind the idea is “not strong.” The girls laughed nervously as some of them tried to defend their decision to hold the event. During this second focus group, the girls explained they had been unable to do all the activities they had wanted to because of exam pressures. Now, towards the end of the academic year, they were trying to think of easy ways to match the fundraising achievements of the previous year’s organising committee. The two instances where Chloe and Charlotte talk over one another reveal that they are very much in agreement that they “don’t like it,” but also that it will go ahead. Chloe’s tone and Charlotte’s laughter in the last two lines suggest that they do not take their own justification that auctioning both boys and girls makes it a feminist endeavour very seriously. I spent much more time with this group than I did with the group in New York, which was perhaps why we were able to get into more critical discussions about Girl Up and about charity fundraising in general. They negotiated the priorities of Girl Up and their own desire to raise awareness and plan meaningful activities carefully. This final extract shows that ultimately, just like the girls in New York, they ended up focusing on activities that what would raise as much money as possible. However, they were keen to stress that they were also engaged in various awareness-raising activities about girls’ rights, as discussed below.

In one further school – the state funded school in New Jersey – the girls embraced the idea of fundraising but had been unable to host any events so far because of school policies. As Madison explained: “we come up with ideas but to actually get them approved is a really difficult process [...] our administration is just very, very strict.” These policies included a rule that prevented them from organising a charity cake sale because that was deemed to be competing with the private catering company that ran the high school canteen and a rule that they would need to hire a security guard for any after school event, which was beyond the club’s budget. As a result, they focused on hosting awareness-raising events and events linked to women’s charities in their own community.

In two of the schools, the girls ignored the Girl Up fundraising commitment. In the Catholic school in New York, the girls had previously had a women's empowerment club, which met regularly to hold discussions about gender inequality in the US and around the world. They registered with Girl Up to give the club more structure but had not changed their activities in any way. When I asked them what the main purpose of their club was, Nicola replied, "just talking about certain issues that we may not have known about or going into deeper understanding of what's going on in the world around us." For these girls, the club is a safe space to discuss a range of topics with like-minded people. All three girls agreed that raising awareness for them "is it" and that in terms of what they were raising awareness about, it was best to "start at home." For them, Girl Up was a way to provide structure and resources for the activities that their pre-existing women's empowerment group had always been doing.

Similarly, in the international school in Lilongwe, the two girls who had just decided to start a club told me that Girl Up appealed to them because it was different to the other extracurricular clubs on offer in their school. As Ahadi explained, "I want something that's like more personal cos with the clubs here it's like fundraise, donate." Ahadi said that she understood Girl Up to be a "girl help girl and raise awareness type of club." These girls eventually contacted the other Girl Up club in Lilongwe, after I provided email addresses with both schools' consent, and established a long-term partnership with the girls there. They had interpreted the campaign to be about connecting girls in different settings and saw it as a welcome change from all the other fundraising clubs on offer in their school.

The strongest deviation from the official campaign, however, was in the township of Lilongwe, where the director of the school set up a Girl Up club with the purpose of fundraising for scholarships for girls within the school. He told me he was fully aware that they were supposed to send that money to the UN Foundation in Washington DC, so that it could fund UN girls' education projects in Malawi, amongst other countries, but he felt strongly that they would never see that

money again. In the meantime, his students were dropping out of school every term. In a focus group, I asked the club president, Olivia, whether she agreed with the director's decision.

Olivia: Mm, somehow [pause] no somehow yes. No because [pause] when we register our Girl Up club [pause] we register to United Nation Foundation, that mean every decision that United Nations made, we, we should do that decision with they want. They say half million per year,¹⁹ we are supposed to give that money because we are on that foundation [RW: Mm mm]. So, I feel like, somehow it's good to donate our fundraising money to the United Nation, but, no because [pause] here in Malawi we have a lot of challenges

RW: Mm

[Pause]

Olivia: Because Malawi it's a [pause] a poverty country, so [laughs] so, ah [pause] it's difficult to take money from here and deliver to the United Nation. But we support just to give those girls who are not able to go to school because of school fees, maybe school () uniforms, school bag, boots. So it's better just to put those things to build those who are in need here.

[Pause]

Aisha: Ah

Olivia: I know.

Olivia's speech was usually animated and self-assured, yet in this extract she pauses frequently, laughs nervously and interrupts her own stream of thought with "ah it's difficult." I interpreted this as showing a real dislike of breaking the rules of Girl Up. Yet she eventually concludes that "it's better." Aisha's "ah" was said with rising intonation as if to question this justification and Olivia's response of "I know" may have been intended to reassure her that as club president, she was not

¹⁹ 500,000 Malawian Kwachas, approximately £500 in 2017.

taking this subject lightly. Whatever the meaning of the last two lines, the hesitations suggest a discomfort in discussing the topic and a dislike of rebelling against the campaign. However, the Girl Up discourse is silent on the capacity of girls in the Global South to find solutions to the problems they experience and so by its very existence, this club disrupted the discourse. This left the girls in the uncomfortable position that in doing something that is within the spirit of the campaign – funding girls’ education in Lilongwe – they were simultaneously breaking the campaign rules.

When I told girls in the Global North about the Malawian girls’ activities, they were filled with admiration. They fully supported the decision to keep the money in that school community, even if it did not conform to the campaign’s goals. Ahadi at the international school said, “That’s good though they should like adapt it to their context,” while Hailey at the school in New Jersey commented, “Yeah I think it’s better that it’s how it isn’t like exactly it’s intended.” The girls in the UK suggested that instead of sending the proceeds of their fundraising to Girl Up, they might send it straight to that school in Lilongwe in order to cut out the “fat cats at the UN.” These reactions show the girls fully supported other girls adapting the campaign to what was needed in their area. While embracing the spirit of the Girl Up campaign, they by no means followed its intended structure of actions, instead interpreting it in ways that they saw as useful and empowering. This is something I explore further in the next section, considering the many activities they engaged in that had nothing to do with fundraising for Girl Up at all and that instead constitute a form of feminist activism.

Girl Up as a “Safe Space” to Mentor and Support Each Other

For most of the girls, the main purpose of a Girl Up club was coming together to support and encourage each other, discuss the challenges they were facing and debate issues relating to women’s rights. This manifested itself in different ways in the different clubs, but always included an element of discussing gender inequality within their own communities that very much disrupted the Northern saviour, Southern victim depiction of the Girl Up discourse. It also disrupted the

individualistic vision of girls' empowerment in the Girl Up discourse with the girls aiming to support one another and to collectively make change.

At the Catholic school in New York, the girls organised regular discussions about issues including the gender pay gap, sexual harassment and intersectional feminism. Their most recent meeting had focused on the stereotypes faced by Muslim women living in the US. Gabriella explained that Girl Up was a place to "vent" her frustrations about sexism with like-minded people: "people can kind of understand you, cos they were like fighting for the same thing." The girls felt that this was their only opportunity in school to discuss feminist issues with their peers. Chloe, the club president in the UK, wanted to create a space where girls felt that they could come and discuss feminism, with an added emphasis on younger girls being able to discuss sexism within the school:

I know that this goes like outside of what the UN want us to do but I kind of wanna make it like a [...] I guess safe space, like anyone can come from like lower school if they need help with anything, cos I know being like a kid in high school is really scary.

Just as Olivia discussed not sending the money from their club in Lilongwe to the UN Foundation, here we have another club president setting out the reasons why her club knowingly deviates from official Girl Up activities.

For the girls in the township of Lilongwe, their weekly meetings were a source of support and information. They performed poetry, song and dance, held debates, heard from female motivational speakers from their community and via Skype from the US and wrote and performed role-plays about topics such as how a girl could confront her parents if they wanted her to marry. They also used the meetings as an opportunity, regardless of the topic set by the teachers, to share information that was vital to getting through everyday life in their township. They told me they shared stories of abuse, including from relatives, who might be "tormenting" a girl or "treat her as not a human being." As Janet explained, the girls would discuss this at Girl Up club and then a group of "maybe five girls and one teacher or mother [...] we speak to them." Later on, Janet explained

that the girls also share information about how to look after themselves. She said it was easier to discuss issues concerning their bodies when “we are only girls.” Many girls regularly missed school because of menstruation and its symptoms, but Janet said this was changing because “now in this girl club we teach each other that yeah, you need to do that, do this and you have painkiller.”

Research suggests that a lack of access to running water, as was the case in this school, physical symptoms of pain and diarrhoea and a lack of information about menstruation all contribute to girls’ absenteeism in Malawi (Grant et al., 2013: 263-4). While many of these factors were out of their control, the girls used Girl Up club as an opportunity to change the one element they could control: how informed they were about their bodies. Although menstruation was never specifically a topic of Girl Up club meetings, it was one that the girls discussed amongst themselves, at a whisper, with the girls next to them. This way, information spread that enabled the girls to better manage their symptoms. This was beyond both the official purpose of the campaign and the activities their teachers had planned for them, but the girls exploited the opportunity to inform themselves and to draw on the support of their peers.

Some girls also spoke about feeling better able to tackle sexism in their schools or communities thanks to the support they gained from fellow club members. For example, the girls in the township had begun to mobilise around confronting parents who were taking their children out of school and this is something they hoped to do more of in future. One of the groups explained to me:

Mayamiko: And we will teach the person we will teach the husband [you

Chikondi: [Husband

Mayamiko: Have not do good thing, have married a young girl and can you see there are so many problems here. This one must go to [school

Fatsani: [For the future.

There was agreement across the eleven different focus groups that this was a good thing to be doing for their club. In one group, I told the club president that I thought the girls were very brave to confront parents and husbands in this way and I asked her if they saw themselves as brave. She replied without hesitation: “Yeah.”

The girls in the UK also described how the support they gained from Girl Up club was helping them to challenge sexism from their teachers. In the following extract, Katie is talking about a recent decision by the Physical Education department in her school to combine girls’ and boys’ badminton lessons. As a result, the girls were amazed to find they were given good quality racquets to play with and that these were the racquets the boys had been playing with all along. Katie explains that the five Year 11 members of Girl Up club were central to standing up to the teachers:

Yeah and at the moment it’s like probably us five and probably a few more that’re like the real feminists, just because we’re probably the most enlightened about it at the moment. So if we just stand up for ourselves in PE and we’re like, that’s not fair, why are the good racquets the boys’ racquets what about us, then people would probably look down but, by having this group and raising awareness just spreading with our peers, spreading it around our year group, it will help and eventually there will be more of us and I think that’ll gain more equality just in our school.

Katie’s comments suggest that without the backing of a club and their fellow members, the girls would not have felt confident enough to challenge the PE department on this clear example of discrimination, nor would they have been taken seriously if they had. In her words, people would “look down” on them. However, if “we just stand up for *ourselves*,” they might get noticed. She paints a picture of a club that is giving girls the courage to speak out against sexism together and that this collective confidence is what will make a difference in their school.

The examples in this section demonstrate the girls coming together, learning from one another and mentoring each other. It shows a rejection of the depiction in the Girl Up discourse of girls’ empowerment as something that happens on an individual basis. The girls saw the struggle to challenge sexism in their schools and communities as a collective one.

Girl Up Members and Feminism

While many of the actions described in this chapter, from challenging domineering parents to mentoring younger girls, could be described as informal political activities, some girls were more overtly organising politically, ranging from hosting political discussions to attending feminist rallies. Chloe, the UK club president, said that she felt that girls' participation in politics was treated as a "joke" in her school and that one of her aims was to change that perception. In the following paragraphs, I analyse the various clubs' engagement with politics.

In all of the focus groups, I asked the girls whether they felt that Girl Up was a political campaign to be involved in. It struck me that the play on the word "manifesto" in the Girl Up poster entitled "Girlafesto" has particularly political connotations and so I decided to ask the girls what they understood by the term "girlafesto." In the US, the girls informed me that they were not very familiar with the word "manifesto," except in having learnt about the Communist Manifesto, and it was not a word they associated with electioneering or political parties, given that candidates there are usually said to run on a "platform." In Malawi, where elections have been dominated by patronage politics and ethnic loyalties rather than ideology since the shift to multi-party democracy in the mid-1990s (Ihonvbere, 1997: 237; Tiessen, 2008: 203), most of the girls were unfamiliar with the English word, although some of the older girls did know its meaning. In the UK, the girls understood the play on words, even if they were underwhelmed by it, as I explored in the previous chapter. At this point in the focus group, I produced a definition of a manifesto from the Collins Dictionary – which describes it as "a public declaration of intent, policy, aims etc, as issued by a political party, government or movement" (Collins Dictionary, nd) – and used this as a starting point for a discussion on whether Girl Up was a political movement. The responses were mixed, with some girls arguing that it definitely was and linking it to the wider feminist movement to justify this claim, while others said they felt it was more like a charity.

These mixed responses are best illustrated by the following extract from the UK, in which the group – the organising committee of their club – eventually reach a consensus of a qualified “yes” in response to my question:

RW: Do you think do you see yourselves as part of a political movement?

[Pause]

Chloe: Yeah

Leah: [Sort of

Charlotte: [Yeah.

Jessica: It’s more of a charity I think really.

Charlotte: Yeah yeah

Chloe: Yeah but the charity’s aiming to change how we look at girls in different countries
how

Charlotte: Yeah

Chloe: Other girls in different countries act and, even though it’s not like a massive world
state it’s still politics.

Leah: It is

Charlotte: Cos there’s a bit influe- emphasis on the awareness isn’t there

Chloe: Mm mm

Charlotte: So that makes it political.

Chloe: Yeah

Leah: It feels more like a pressure group

Bethan: Yeah

Leah: Kind of in a way than, like, a political kind of group.

Chloe: Yeah but [pressure groups are politics

Leah: [But at the same time yeah you, you know what I mean like instead of like a, a political party kind of thing, it feels more like, like Greenpeace or whatever that kind of vibe to it, but [for girls

Chloe: [Yeah but they are trying to see political change in the world aren't they

Leah: Yeah yeah

Chloe: [And I think that we are as well

Leah: [Yeah but I mean like not not not a party, but a group, you know like, like not the Conservatives

Chloe: Yeah I know but this isn't meant to be a party

[Laughter]

Leah: [Laughs] No I know that.

In this interaction, the group are divided between Chloe, who is confident that Girl Up is political, and Leah, who gives a qualified answer. While other group members contribute, with Jessica stating that it is more of a “charity” and Charlotte intervening at various points to support both sides of the argument, it eventually turns into a discussion between Chloe and Leah. Leah’s qualified “yes” is typical of the research on girls’ activism, which shows that even girls themselves are likely to portray themselves as “not political” (Taft, 2014: 263). However, Chloe counters every statement that Leah makes about their activities by arguing assertively that they are political acts. Eventually, Leah concedes. The girls’ responses followed along similar lines across the different groups with many girls, like Leah, arguing that while their activities were relevant to politics they would not describe Girl Up itself as political, and many others, like Chloe, wanting to prove that girls could and did take part in politics.

In all of the US and UK groups, the girls talked about the recent women’s marches that had taken place around the world. While the girls in Wales had found it too difficult to organise a trip to their nearest one in a nearby city in England, they felt strongly that they should start planning how

they might be able to go to a future one, taking with them “signs or something to promote Girl Up.”

To them, attending a political demonstration was compatible with Girl Up club. The girls from the Catholic school in New York also found it difficult to organise going together, but attended nonetheless.

RW: Did any of you march or

Nicola: Yeah.

Lucia: Yes.

Nicola: We marched we marched in DC.

Lucia: Yeah.

Nicola: We had the opportunity to go there.

RW: OK and was that like something you did as kind of Girl Up or was it just something you did

Nicola: Well I was gonna go anyway and then in Girl Up we started talking about trying to get like a bus down or something like that, but it kind our plans kind of fell through, so I went kinda separately like, with all the things I’ve learned in Girl Up just in the back of my head.

Gabriella: Yeah

Nicola: It was [amazing.

Lucia: [It was awesome.

Gabriella: It was like such a great experience cos like I’d never like, done something like that before like I’d never been as, I think like Girl Up really gave me an opportunity to be educated about this.

For both groups of girls, getting the school’s permission to travel together to a political demonstration would be almost impossible for a host of reasons relating to health and safety, insurance and the need for a chaperone. However, this did not stop them. The girls in the UK

shared videos and articles about the marches on their club's Facebook page and began making plans to attend future marches. Although the girls in New York attended separately, Nicola was keen to stress that "we" marched, spurred on by participation in Girl Up club. Nicola and Gabriella both imply that they might not have attended a march if it were not for everything they had learnt about feminism in Girl Up. Nicola and Lucia's simultaneous proclamations of "it was amazing" and "it was awesome" suggest that this was a positive experience they might repeat in future.

Some girls also took part in lobbying activities, beyond the letter writing about refugee girls' education advocated by Girl Up (discussed in Chapter 5). Hailey from New Jersey had travelled to Washington DC and arranged an interview with a tax expert from a congressman's office. She grilled them on why tampons were taxed as a luxury item and was so frustrated with their response that she set up a collection of sanitary products for local homeless women, along with a series of posters raising awareness in the school about their tax status and the fact that they cannot be purchased using food stamps. She hoped to inspire other girls to take up the campaign and lobby their representatives. The girls in the township in Lilongwe also talked of wanting to speak to village chiefs about the importance of girls' education and of going to the police when a girl got married to demand that they enforce the recently introduced law making it illegal to marry before the age of 18. When I asked one group whether they saw Girl Up as political, Aisha replied that it was because their activities – going to communities and raising awareness about the importance of educating girls – are "the same the political people do." In every context, girls were engaging in political activities and networks, both formal and informal.

Almost all of the girls identified as feminists. A small number in the US gave a qualified response of "yes" to my question, "would you describe yourself as a feminist?" because they felt they were still learning about feminist topics and one girl in the UK said that she believed in gender equality, but "cos I am a Christian I don't really I don't think I can say that I'm a feminist," something which her peers found difficult to understand, as discussed later. Girls at both schools in Lilongwe

asked me what the definition of a feminist was and, when I gave it, identified with the term, as in the following extract from the focus group at the international school:

Shrimayi: Wait what is the actual definition of feminism

RW: Erm, so [pause] well I think if you look it up in the dictionary it's like, erm, someone who believes in the social, economic and political equality of the sexes.

[Pause]

Shrimayi: [OK that

Ahadi: [That I can agree to.

Shrimayi: Then yeah.

While their responses varied from girls who had been lifelong feminists and joined Girl Up because of that orientation, to girls who were still making up their minds but felt that the more they learnt about feminism, the more they identified with it, the dominant response across the groups was that the girls themselves were feminist and that Girl Up was a feminist organisation.

The closest the girls came to rejecting feminist politics came in their firm belief that in 2017, it should not still be necessary to call oneself a feminist. This was not the rejection of feminism highlighted in the literature on postfeminist discourses, in which it is seen as no longer being needed (McRobbie, 2009: 12), but rather a criticism of society for not having fully embraced feminism. In New Jersey, Isabella explained that "it should just be something more of like proper values erm, just because this is something that like everybody can get behind." Several groups expressed difficulty in understanding why so many people were not prepared to identify with wanting equality for women and girls. Similar to Isabella's declaration that feminism is just "proper values," Hannah in the UK was keen to point out that not being a feminist was a poor reflection on someone's character:

RW: So, would you all describe yourselves as feminists?

Ellie: Yeah

Lucy: [Yeah

Anwen: [Yeah

Katie: [Yeah definitely

Hannah: Well I think [laughs] erm, there's, do you know Maisie Williams the actress?

RW: No

Hannah: Well she said that you shouldn't have to call yourself a feminist you should have to call yourself normal and everyone else is sexist.

Katie: Yeah I agree with that.

The girls did not hesitate to all answer my question at once, suggesting that identifying as feminists is unproblematic for them. Hannah's comments, just like Isabella's, do not represent a rejection of feminism, but rather a criticism of anyone who does reject that label and the politics it represents. While feminism may appear as common sense to these girls, as postfeminist discourses might suggest it would, that does not mean that they see it as appearing to be common sense to the rest of the population. They are fully aware that many people do not embrace the principle of gender equality and that there is still much work left for feminism to do.

The girls repeatedly aired their frustration at the stigma that surrounds feminism. This was something that they encountered on a regular basis in school as well as online. Many of the girls talked of male friends who refused to engage with women's rights for fear that it would make them seem less masculine. Hailey in New Jersey described trying to persuade a male classmate to tweet something for international women's day and said that he was reluctant to because "it's like he didn't want to like ruin his brand I guess as like a boy." The girls in the UK school had a similar discussion:

Leah: I think there's a lot of negative connotations with the word feminism purely because it's related to feminine, which guys don't want they don't it's

Bethan: Yeah

Leah: They're all they're always [you gotta be you gotta be

Chloe: [You can't be seen to be

Leah: A guy

Chloe: Yeah

Leah: You gotta be strong [...] but it doesn't seem like you don't think fe- feminism goes straight to equality, you think feminism you think oh bra burning and let's go off and [destroy the patriarchy

Chloe: [Down with the man

Leah: Kind of like madness [instead of

Chloe: [Sorry isn't that what this group is

[Laughter]

[Pause]

Charlotte: I think you're in the wrong room.

[Pause]

Bethan: I'm not burning my bras they're too expensive.

[Laughter]

There is a great deal going on in this discussion, where the girls are simultaneously distancing themselves from the negative stereotype of radical feminists, whilst mocking people who automatically connect feminists with that stereotype. While Chloe and Leah agree with each other, to the point of talking over one another, about boys their age feeling unable to embrace feminism because of their desire to conform to dominant norms about masculinity ("you gotta be a guy"), when Leah starts to mock stereotypes of feminists and distance Girl Up from them, Chloe's question ("Sorry...") actually serves to interrupt Leah's flow rather than to reinforce it as before. Whilst making a joke, she is perhaps also shutting down the implicit criticism of radical feminism by suggesting that the picture of a club Leah is painting might not be so bad after all. Similarly, while Bethan's refusal to burn her bras might be read as a rejection of radical feminism, it could also be seen as a critique of the way that corporations make more profit out of women's clothing, beauty

and health products than they do men's, an issue that had featured prominently in the news and on social media in recent months. While there are other possible interpretations of Chloe and Bethan's interjections, and they may have simply been meant as light-hearted jokes, the girls' collective laughter shows that Leah's point was not being taken too seriously and they did not all rush to join in her condemnation of radical feminism or distance themselves from it.

While it is not entirely clear how these girls feel about radical feminism, it is clear that they are sick of stereotypes about feminists, which they encounter frequently at school. In the younger year group at the same school, some of the girls told me that friends did not attend Girl Up because of teasing from boys. The third group at the school told me that it was not only boys who held negative views about feminism:

Lauren: A girl told me she didn't like feminazis and I was like, what what does that mean, explain to me what you mean by that, she's just like angry feminists I'm like, but they're still a feminist like don't compare them to Hitler

Sophie: Yeah

Lauren: That that's a terrible comparison.

Far from rejecting or being repulsed by feminism, as the postfeminist literature might suggest, these girls identify with it strongly, to the point of criticising those who hold inaccurate stereotypes about what the term means. They not only identified with the label, but they also took part in, or planned to take part in, marches as part of the global feminist movement.

Girls Resisting Hostile Attitudes towards Feminism and Girl Up in School

In every fieldwork location, the girls experienced teasing or bullying for attending Girl Up club and their resistance to this stigma is another way in which their participation in Girl Up constituted a form of activism. In the UK school, the girls told me about family members who did not understand

why a girls' rights club was needed in 2017 and mocked the girls for attending. They also felt that the environment within school was unsupportive at times, commenting that their tutors frequently made jokes or quips about the club. Some male teachers had openly mocked them during the presentations they gave in their school about girls' rights, something which for many of them was their first experience of public speaking on that scale. As Rhiannon explained:

I think back to the assembly as well like, I think also male teachers are also the issue [...] if they're on the sides and sat there just like si- sniggering and not taking it seriously then they're just, all the kids are gonna think it's OK to laugh at it.

Despite the feeling that they were not being supported by their own teachers, the girls continued with their awareness-raising efforts regardless, eventually speaking to every year group of their school through talks and assemblies.

While the hostility from teachers and parents was unique to the school in the UK, in every school girls talked about negative attitudes from their peers towards Girl Up. The most common complaint against Girl Up club was that there was no 'boy up' club, or that the money raised was only going to girls' education projects, which the boys claimed they perceived to be discriminatory. Shrimayi at the international school in Lilongwe told me that one boy said to her, "I'll start boy up you watch," almost as if it was a threat. Some boys did not even draw on the language of equality in order to criticise Girl Up; many were overtly misogynistic. For example, the girls in the township of Lilongwe told me that the boys mocked them for attending a club that encouraged them to dream of achieving their goals. Charmaine said, "They see us like useless people that cannot do anything in life." However, she added that the girls were determined to show the boys "that we are also people who can make something in the future." Similarly, Ethel explained that some girls at the school felt unable to join because of teasing: "sometimes boys always saying that you are just wasting your time, because in future you will be [laughs] a wife." At the coeducational independent school in New York, the girls agreed that Girl Up was "not that popular," especially with the boys, who "make pretty bad comments." Once again, this paints a picture of a hostile environment in which girls and

their participation in any kind of feminist organising are not taken seriously. The members carried on with their activities regardless, determined to change these perceptions.

The girls in the UK even felt that they encountered negative attitudes from male members of the Girl Up club. In the following extract, the girls are discussing times when they have had negative comments from boys about being in Girl Up. Chloe, the club president, asks one of the quieter girls, Jessica, what her experiences have been.

Chloe: What about you, Jessica

Jessica: Like I get that as well to be honest, when I'm talking, you know, certain people in my fre- frees, though he has shut up a bit more now

Chloe: Is it Dan

Jessica: No

Chloe: Is it James

Jessica: Yeah

[Laughter]

Jessica: [I think

Chloe: [James's in the club.

[Laughter]

Jessica: Yeah

Chloe: He's the [vice president of the club why's he talking trash

Jessica: [He keeps he's like, but he doesn't talk exact trash well any more [at least

Chloe: [He does, he does.

The final line of this extract suggests that Chloe already knows that James has been "talking trash" about Girl Up or about feminism, even before Jessica's revelation. Jessica tries to defend him by saying that he is improving, but Chloe interrupts to disagree. After this exchange, Chloe went on to conclude that she needed to "have a word" with James about not taking his vice-presidential duties

seriously and potentially even hold another election for a new vice president. The girls speculated that the only reason James put himself up for the role was because it would look good on his CV. For these girls, then, they were not only fighting battles to get people to take feminism seriously within their school, but also internally within their own club.

The girls adopted various strategies to navigate this hostility. The first was to opt for events that had a mass appeal, such as pizza parties and cake sales. As one girl in New Jersey put it, “we’re planning on luring them in with pizza and then showing them a [laughs] presentation about Girl Up.” A second strategy the girls in the UK used was to include boys in the club, encouraging them to present at assemblies and awareness raising events. In Rhiannon’s words, “we had to have a boy so that they’d take [the assembly] seriously.” The third and perhaps most significant strategy was the choice to affiliate with Girl Up at all. Several of the groups felt that having the resources available to them online as part of Girl Up and being associated with the UN Foundation name made it easier for them to have a club about girls’ rights. Hailey in New Jersey explained,

It makes it like saying Girl Up and like having a, being affiliated with the UN and like helping like girls in other countries like, makes it kind of like, appear less like radical like. I like I don’t think like a simply like women’s empowerment or feminist club like would’ve been as popular, like there are definitely people in the school who would love that, erm, but I just think that like Girl Up is a little bit more appealing to the masses as well.

This quote shows a critical assessment of the Girl Up discourse. Hailey’s assessment that it comes across as “less radical” than a feminist club shows an understanding that organisations such as the UN Foundation avoid involving themselves in controversial debates in order to attract as many supporters as possible. While these girls may be organising forums to discuss the US election or interviewing staff of their congressman about the tampon tax, they can also present a front to their school that they are part of a UN Foundation campaign raising money for girls’ education “in other countries.” Hailey was keen to stress that was not the only reason they got involved with Girl Up and it is important not to overstate this strategic move. The girls also strongly identified with, and enjoyed being part of, the campaign. However, they showed an ability to critically assess this

campaign in relation to the feminist movement and to judge that, faced with such hostility to feminism, a Girl Up club would be able to reach more people within their schools.

Conclusions

The girls participating in this research are feminist activists whose activism aims not only to change attitudes in their own schools and communities, but also to take their demands for girls' rights to policy makers and political fora. They encourage their classmates to be more engaged in politics and feminism and they are constantly fighting against hostility because of their actions. Their activities include marching, educating, standing up to authority figures and domineering male peers, mentoring younger girls, challenging sexism and occasionally fundraising. They carry them out despite their schoolmates' or even teachers' attempts to silence them. While they all spoke of their desire to continue their activism in future by joining feminist societies at university or starting more Girl Up clubs, they are not activists "in progress" (Taft, 2017: 29). They are feminist activists now and they are engaged in educating thousands of people within their school communities about the rights of girls.

All the girls told me that being a part of Girl Up, discussing issues affecting girls and the support they gained from other members had made them more confident. For some, this meant feeling confident to present to a room full of their peers or to stand up to a boy who made sexist remarks and for others it was much more. Aisha in Lilongwe told me, "when I join girl club I was empty," but "I know who I am now." If one of the aims of feminism is to build young women's confidence to take collective action, then these Girl Up clubs were achieving it. This was a result of the many creative ways the girls adapted these activities to their own settings and to what they saw as empowering for themselves. My analysis demonstrates that they creatively negotiate, and frequently disrupt, the Girl Up discourse, finding their own ways to undertake feminist activism from within the campaign. How they negotiated doing so within a campaign that reproduces depoliticised and individualistic discourses about girls is explored in much greater depth in the following chapters.

Chapter 8 – “We Stand on Our Own”: Girls in Lilongwe

Negotiating Individualism and Instrumentalism

A recurring theme throughout the Girl Up discourse is a focus on the individual girl: as potential saviour of her family and community and as responsible for making the ‘right’ choices in order to fulfil that role. If neoliberalism is characterised by “a decentralised government; the privatisation of social programmes, education systems and other services; increased consumer power; free market strategies; global competition; and the erasure of sociocultural identities and differences” (Bent, 2013a: 6), then there is much about the Girl Up campaign that is distinctly neoliberal. Its emphasis on Northern-funded scholarships for Southern girls bypasses national governments and education systems, positing girls’ education as an economic investment rather than a public good. Education is positioned as a form of ‘human capital’ rather than a fundamental right (Banet-Weiser, 2015: 184; Calkin, 2015b: 5; Roberts, 2012: 95; Switzer, 2013: 349). The return on the investment is seen to stem from providing girls with the skills they need to compete in a global labour market and the assumption that they will be able to do so, and succeed, erases the many sociocultural factors that place communities in the Global South at a disadvantage in global economic structures. At the heart of all of this is a focus on the individual girl as subject of investment, worker and competitor. As the quote in the title of this chapter suggests, the girls’ negotiation of this discourse was complex. While they embraced narratives of independence from men and of girls’ or women’s individual success, they did so in a way that did not reject collective struggles against oppression. They saw Girl Up as a forum for girls to help each other to achieve that independence and success. As one girl in Lilongwe put it, “we stand on our own.”

In this chapter, I explore the Southern girls’ negotiation of individualistic, neoliberal discourses of girls’ potential and of gender equality. Whilst all very closely linked, I have broken this topic into three sub-topics: individualism, instrumentalism and perceptions of risk and girls’

sexuality. Chapter 9 deals with a fourth interlinked sub-topic, the spectacularisation of Northern girlhood. In the following sections, I explore girls' negotiation of individualistic discourses of empowerment, drawing on the focus group data to argue that the girls in Lilongwe both took up and rejected the responsibilities placed on the shoulders of girls in the Global South. They dreamed of achieving great things: of becoming politicians, of running hospitals, of educating others, but not because they wished to achieve economic targets, rather because they wanted to ensure that no girls or women had to suffer discrimination in future. They dreamed of independence from men and from their parents, but they believed that collective organising and mutual support were the way to achieve this. They wanted to encourage their fellow girls to take their education seriously, but they also discussed the many reasons they might not be able to do so. And while the girls in Lilongwe reproduced discourses of risk around their sexuality, they did so because of concerns for their friends' health and bodies, not because they thought that a teenage pregnancy was a missed economic opportunity. Ultimately, I argue, they drew on neoliberal discourses of girls' academic success and financial responsibility to make the case for their own, collective vision of girls' empowerment that would ultimately improve the lives of girls and women in their community.

Girls, Individualism and Education in Lilongwe

Campaigns such as the Girl Effect and Girl Up perpetuate the "quintessential girl power story where economic prosperity 'naturally' occurs once girls 'choose' to be successful" (Bent, 2013a: 12). They assume that given an education, a girl will work hard to achieve great things and to share her success with others. With an education, a girl "has the tools she needs to transform her community and the world" (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016f). This is an essentialist discourse, that sees girls as more hard-working and altruistic than their male peers, placing responsibility on them not to waste an opportunity that is given to them (Gonick, 2006: 10; Gordon, 2006: 12; Hayhurst, 2013; Hickel, 2014: 1356). In Lilongwe, the girls seemed eager to assume this responsibility. They were faced with patriarchal discourses that see boys as more intelligent and as future breadwinners, which is

perhaps why depictions of individual success stemming from hard work alone appealed to them.

Perhaps, when constantly being told that girls cannot, and do not need to, achieve good grades at school, a campaign presenting girls as capable of succeeding if they work hard enough seems genuinely uplifting. One of the reasons they loved Girl Up club, Charmaine told me, was because it encouraged girls to “start loving the school.”

One group were excited to tell me about a motivational speaker that the two school directors had recently paid to come and give a talk to the club.

Olivia: Last time we had a visitor from Chancellor College, Chancellor University, and she told that we should believe ourselves that we can do anything

RW: Mm

Olivia: Despite being girls, this is very good. [Laughs]

RW: And how did you feel listening to that?

[Pause]

Olivia: It's so good.

RW: Yeah

Violet: Yeah.

Olivia: You feel that [laughs] great.

()

Tadala: It was very excited cos, they the visitor was very young, is was at that age at twenty

Violet: Yeah

Tadala: Yeah [cos

Olivia: [But she was doing a lot.

Tadala: Yeah, she does a lot and right now she she she's, she's schoo- she's no [pause] she's doing a law she is a lawyer

Violet: Yeah

Tadala: Yeah, she is a lawyer so

RW: Wow [a lawyer

Tadala: [She yeah she advised us to work hard in class and we must feel how bad we want to achieve our goals.

Hanissa,²⁰ the woman who came to speak to the girls from the arts, humanities and social sciences branch of the University of Malawi, was from the same township as the girls. They were delighted to hear that it was possible for a girl from their area to aspire to study a subject like law at university. They describe themselves as feeling “great” and “excited” to hear her speak. She frequently adopted an individualistic tone during her motivational talks by stressing to the girls that all they needed to do was to work hard in order to study at university like her. Although Girl Up members regularly missed school due to being unable to afford fees, having too many household chores, being ill or menstruating, and they told me they struggled to participate in class because of class sizes and teasing from male peers, they were keen to repeat the message that all a girl needed to do to succeed was to work hard. They grinned all the way through this extract and Olivia even laughs at two points as she describes her emotion at hearing the talk. In the section beginning “It was very excited,” Violet, Tadala and Olivia were very animated, tripping over one another to describe the talk. As Pilirani told me in one of the other groups, girls could do anything if only they had “the spirit to learn.” Across all of the groups, girls told me that Girl Up club was good for their school because it was teaching girls to take their studies seriously and many cited Hanissa’s talk as a particular inspiration in this.

Although they took great pleasure in Hanissa’s talk, the girls’ discussion of girls’ education did not uncritically reproduce neoliberal discourses of individual success. When I changed my line of questioning to ask them what stopped girls from achieving in school, they gave a long list of reasons that were not down to an individual girl’s failure to work hard. Aisha said that “what make them to

²⁰ I have kept Hanissa’s real name as this thesis is dedicated to her.

fail to go to school is for teasing. Yah some boys they said ah you cannot make it.” Mary said that many children do not attend school in Malawi because “there are a lot of orphans.” A lot of the girls talked about lack of money to pay the fees, while Doris also felt that it depended on the girl’s family and friends and their attitudes towards girls’ education: “they don’t have a guide, a guidance to lead them to go to school.” The girls were also keen to stress that fees alone were not enough to guarantee a girl’s education.

Chikondi: It’s not only fees that we provide, also other resources that the person is lacking

Mayamiko: Yeah

Chikondi: Cos you can only just give them her fees, but she don’t have food to eat [cos ()

Mayamiko: [She don’t have clothes to wear.

Chikondi: Can you come in class and learn while she’s hungry? She needs everything to support her, everything, yeah.

In their own fundraising activities, these girls tried to provide not only scholarships for school fees, but also basic supplies. Chikondi’s question “can you come in class and learn while she’s hungry?” directly contradicts the idea that success is only about having the “spirit to learn.” While Girl Up materials focus on providing simply an “education” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016f), “the uniform, textbooks and supplies to go to school” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016g) or a bike to get a girl from her home to the classroom (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2017u) to help a girl “transform her community,” the girls in Lilongwe identified wider basic needs they felt needed to be met before a girl could succeed. These included addressing structural and community level issues such as poverty and hunger, parental attitudes about education and harassment from boys. As Chikondi explains, a girl “needs everything to support her” and unless that is the case, she cannot be expected to “come in class and learn.”

Girls stressed that a key factor in preventing them from succeeding at school was their parents. While conservative discourses in Malawi, and in development campaigns such as Girl Up,

focus on the role of sexual relationships on girls' dropout rates from school, research suggests that it is frequently parents whose 'choices' determine whether a girl will finish her education or not (Grant, 2012: 74). When faced with difficult financial decisions about school fees, research shows a preference amongst parents to prioritise boys' education in the hopes of a return on their investment through earnings, while girls are seen as a valuable source of domestic labour (Davison, 1993: 334; Sankhulani, 2007: 102). This theme emerged repeatedly in the focus groups:

Tamanda: A girl see it can see like a erm, a woman of the house and the, the parents receive the boys into the school the girls it can sit on the house and making the different works

RW: Mm

Tamanda: Like cooking washing and this sorts

Edith: Taking care of the children.

The girls told me that they frequently missed lessons or were late because they were expected to perform domestic tasks and even take care of younger siblings. Or sometimes, they were simply too tired from the previous evening's chores to get up in time. Rather than frame this in terms of an individual failing, the girls were critical of parents' decisions. At one point, I asked the girls what they thought about the school directors' decision to send girls away if they turned up for school late. I was surprised to find they agreed with the punishment, even in the cases where the girl was late because she had been made to carry out domestic chores in the morning. Aisha explained:

Yeah [pause] cos [pause] when, when we as a as a student, we will receive the punishment, when we go home we can explain it to tell them parents that I, today I received the punishment from the teacher, from the teacher, and to them, they can be ashamed say ah, this one received the the punishment why, said ah, cos I was late in class and I find other students was learning a lot day of things.

For Aisha, the punishment is justified not because it is aimed at the girl, but because it is necessary to make the girl's parents feel ashamed of their behaviour in making her late for school by forcing

her to do chores. She not only blames girls' parents for their inability to attend school on time, but she feels that they need to be made to feel the shame of their actions and sees the school directors as allies in achieving this. This is a very different response to girls' unfair domestic burden than that of Girl Up, which is providing lanterns to girls in Ethiopia so they can study late into the evening after finishing their chores, as discussed in Chapter 5 (Girl Up, nd f). In all of the girls' discussions, girls' housework was framed as an injustice and the solution was in educating parents not to treat their daughters so differently to their sons. The girls, then, were very aware of the many material and structural factors that prevented them from getting an education that are erased in the Girl Up discourse. From lack of money and resources, to bullying from boys, to parents' attitudes, they were clear that girls do not simply drop out of school because of individual failure or making the wrong 'choices.' They took great pleasure in the Girl Up discourse and its ambitious claims about what they could achieve, but they did not reproduce all of its claims about how girls come to make those achievements.

Unlike the diligent Southern girl in the Girl Up discourse who is desperate for someone to invest in her education so she can work tirelessly to improve her situation, the girls in Lilongwe also spoke of their occasional apathy towards education. On many occasions towards the end of term, I would arrive at the school to find girls sitting outside because it was beyond the school's cut-off point for paying the term's fees. The directors told me that some of them were given fees by their parents but spent them on other things. On one occasion, I asked a group of Girl Up club members why they weren't in school and they told me that it was because they had "eaten their fees," before bursting into sheepish laughter. They could have told me a different story or emphasised how hard they would be working if they had the money to pay their fees. Yet on this occasion, they were happy to admit that they were spending the day sitting around chatting because they had thought of a better way to spend their school fees. It may be that their choice of wording reflects the usage of the money and that they bought food for themselves because they were hungry. Or it may be that they spent the money on doing something fun with their friends. Either way, this admission and the

laughter that followed do not match the depiction of the hard-working, selfless girl either in Girl Up materials or in their own Girl Up club which urged them to work hard and take school seriously.

Furthermore, while the girls in Lilongwe felt that Girl Up helped them to develop the “spirit to learn,” they also stressed that it was “to encourage each other.” This was a theme that came up in almost every group. Far from feeling that girls needed to work on themselves as an individual project, the participants repeatedly stressed that girls needed support and encouragement. If viewed alone, Hanissa and the directors’ motivational talks about working hard could certainly be seen to be reproducing individualistic discourses that place responsibility for their success or failure on girls’ shoulders alone. However, taken in the wider context of discourses in Malawi that see girls’ education as representing lost domestic labour and that see girls as less intelligent than boys, their message is a subversive one. Furthermore, while the girls took great pleasure in this message and the potential futures it opened up to them, they did not interpret it to mean that failure to succeed was their own fault. They were quick to name the many factors preventing them from succeeding and to work together collectively – rather than individually – to overcome them.

“Girls Have a Kind Heart”: Negotiating the Instrumentalist Case for Investing in Girls

As discussed in Chapter 2, a growing body of research shows women’s increased output, higher rate of investment in their families and communities and superior rate of loan payback (Shain, 2013: 1.2), which has been seized upon by development institutions to make an essentialist case for investing in women and girls based on the “efficiency” it unleashes in achieving other development outcomes (Calkin, 2015b; Chant, 2016b; Eyben, 2010: 56; Roberts, 2015; Stuart and Woodroffe, 2016: 77). It is the epitome of neoliberal, individualistic approaches to development because it asks girls and women to use their supposedly altruistic nature to help their families, communities and nations without asking their states to intervene to support them in any way. In the following paragraphs, I

explore how the girls in this study negotiated this responsibility. While they certainly seemed to embrace the essentialist narrative that girls are more family- and community-oriented than boys their age, their own visions of what girls can do with their success reveal a deep commitment to structural feminist goals, such as improving reproductive healthcare and combating discrimination in the workplace.

The essentialist assertion that women are more community-minded, responsible with money and generous to family and others is one that reproduces patronising discourses of selfless motherhood, discouraging women from making demands based on their own needs and making it easier for their unpaid domestic and social reproductive labour to be labelled as “voluntary” and as a “product of family love” (Calkin, 2015b: 9; see also Grosser and van der Gaag, 2013). In general, the girls in Lilongwe did not question the depiction of a girl as kinder, more responsible and harder working than a boy. As Ethel explained:

When boys are educate [pause] we just move from our country to be another country and doing jobs there, without thinking about our nation, without thinking our community so that when the girl are educated, we will be with our parents and we help our parents, our community, our relative, than a boy. [RW: Mm] Because the girl is, what have I say, a girl is a good behaviour person than a boy.

For Ethel, boys display selfishness by taking their education and going to find a good job overseas, abandoning their relatives and their countries. Girls, however, are better behaved than boys and stay to “be with our parents.” In another group, I asked why the girls thought that boys and girls used their education in different ways. Takondwa told me that it was because “girls have a kind heart.” Rather than challenge whether this should be the case, the girls largely seemed to accept it as inevitable. In several groups, I floated the idea that a boy club was needed in order to “teach the boys to support their families better.” This was frequently met with agreement, but also playful laughter, and the girls seemed to see this suggestion as at best idealistic and at worst unrealistic. It was not one they took very seriously.

Although the girls were critical of parents giving much greater domestic workloads to girls than to boys, they did not go so far as to question whether this division of responsibility towards parents and wider family members could be changed in the future. As Grace explained, “because a girl child can help her parents, she has a heart to help them, but when it comes to a boy I think it cannot happen.” The girls stressed that within a marriage, a husband would only take care of his wife and children, or possibly his own family, leaving nobody to help the wife’s parents in their old age. They seemed resigned to bearing this responsibility and were eager to achieve financial independence from their future husbands so that they could ensure their families were taken care of. While this certainly involved embracing the individual responsibility that was being placed on them by governments, by husbands and by campaigns such as Girl Up, at least a part of their motivation was independence from men and taking control of their own and their family’s destinies.

Similarly, while the girls seemed to accept the narrative that girls could help lift Malawi out of poverty, they did so with the aim of fixing gender injustice and inequality. The girls recited the club motto of “educated girls, better society” multiple times at the beginning and end of each of their club meetings. A recurring theme in the focus groups was the mantra, as Patience put it, “when we educate girls, we educate the whole nation because when the girl educated she can help communities.” This is strikingly similar to Girl Up’s claims that “When you invest in a girl, you invest in an entire community and, because of girls like Monica – an entire country” (Girl Up Fundraising Team, 2016b). However, when the girls elaborated on what their goals were for their communities, they focused on improving the lives and status of women. In the following extracts, the girls are discussing the jobs they want to do in future. In the first, Patience has just said that she wants to be a company director and Olivia has said she wants to run a hospital.

Tadala: When Patience have a co- have his own company she it easy to employ girls

Patience: Yeah

Tadala: And means many girls will be employed in that company

Patience: Yeah

Tadala: Also, same to Olivia when you have erm, a hospital, she will employ [pause] er girls too, yeah. That mean in coming years, so many wome- girls will be employed in many jobs.

Violet: When I finish school I want to become a doctor, so that I can help people, mostly the pregnancy women so, because nowadays [pause] the people who are dying the hospital are pregnant women.

RW: Pregnant women.

Violet: Yes, so I want to have my own hospital so that I can help these womens.

Many of the girls' dreams involved feminist aims. Some wanted to be journalists, to raise awareness about women's rights. Some wanted to be teachers and start Girl Up clubs in every community, to encourage girls to believe in themselves. Many talked about wanting to run hospitals providing affordable healthcare to women, especially pregnant women. In a country where nearly 0.7 per cent of live births result in the mother's death, this was a priority for many of the girls (Sarelin, 2014: 332). Underlying all of these dreams was a desire to improve the lives of women. While the girls accepted the responsibility of lifting Malawi out of poverty, they gave it their own feminist twist, inspired by the gender injustices they saw around them. In this sense, their desires to "change the world" can also be read as a desire to wrestle power out of the hands of men, who they saw as failing to provide for women's basic rights and needs.

This negotiation of individualistic discourses is perhaps best summarised by the following extract from a focus group in the township of Lilongwe, which is long but worth quoting in full because it contains many of these contradictions:

Chikondi: Ah we girls when two to three or five years to come, like more girls will be educated

Chiyembezeko: Yeah

Chikondi: More people will be independent, cos when somebody's educated [...] they won't lean on their husbands on their parents, no we stand on our own doing things eh.

[Laughter]

Chikondi: Supporting ourselves.

RW: Yeah

Chiyembezeko: Yeah.

Chikondi: Supporting our families, supporting the nation.

Mayamiko: Yes the society.

[Pause]

Fatsani: Also, if they are like our voice will change the world

Mayamiko: Yeah

Fatsani: Even our () the women can change the world because of their words, how you speak, and help and encourage us, even I can be a president, I can encourage girls that ah look at them I'm a girl and I'm a president. You, you can do so as well.

[Pause]

Chikondi: I also see that, say that, can be a different colour, different in speaking like we are one, and with our unity we can make something. Yes.

The girls accept the responsibility for their families and their nation, but they also express a desire to be independent of their husbands and parents. They accept the responsibility of changing the world, but not through increased economic output for Malawi, but rather through meaningful participation and even leadership in political change. They embrace discourses of success and achievement and yet the only time one of the girls in this extract refers to one girl alone achieving something is when Fatsani stresses the impact that being president could have in inspiring other girls. They almost always refer to girls in the plural and have a sense that these are dreams that girls will achieve together. As Chikondi says, "we stand on our own," "supporting ourselves" and "with our unity we can make something." As this extract shows, the girls' negotiation of neoliberal

discourses is far more complex than a simple reading of Girl Up texts would imply. And it is almost never a direct reproduction of the individualistic discourses visible in the campaign.

Overall, none of the groups seemed to question the essentialist narrative that girls are harder working, more responsible and more community-minded than boys. Neither did they question whether development interventions might focus instead on educating boys to aspire to those qualities too. However, they took up this position because they wanted to achieve independence from men, to ensure that their parents are provided for in old age and to improve the lives of other Malawian women. While taking on that responsibility certainly helps to fill the gaps in state provision left by predominantly male politicians' blindness to women's lives, from the girls' perspective it comes from a desire to ultimately take control of such provision. They do not only want to give money to their parents, or ensure their own children are educated, they also want to become directors of hospitals or even president of Malawi and dictate policy regarding that provision. It therefore shows an aim to eventually seize power from the hands of men and alter the society that they see as so unfair to women.

Girls, Risk and Sexuality

Koffman and Gill identify a core theme of the girl power discourses of development as seeking "to promote in countries of the Global South a notion of female adolescence as a time free from and prior to marriage and childbearing – to be spent instead in education" (2013: 88). Campaigns such as Girl Up, with their emphasis on delayed motherhood, resonate deeply with conservative discourses and panic about teenage girls' sexuality in donor countries such as the US and UK, as well as in programme countries such as Malawi. The girls in Lilongwe mostly reproduced these discourses, emphasising the need for girls to protect themselves from risky behaviours and to concentrate on their studies. Once again, however, while they reproduced some representations that see individual girls as responsible for making the right decisions, they did so with collective, feminist aims in mind.

The girls in the township school in Lilongwe were subject to strict rules about their sexuality. Students could be suspended from their studies if the teachers found out that they were in a relationship with another student. The school directors were keen to stress that this was much more lenient than the automatic exclusion that was the norm in most schools. They did not want to exclude children from education altogether, but they felt that parents would not send children to that school if relationships went unpunished. The ‘danger’ of relationships with boys was reinforced at every given opportunity. On one occasion, Madame Banda, the school’s English teacher and patron of the Girl Up club, invited me to join a lesson she was giving on Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. None of the students had copies of the text, so Madame Banda read scenes aloud and then summarised them. She asked the students to write a list of adjectives to describe the characters of Romeo and Juliet in this scene. The girls and boys were equally damning of Juliet, labelling her as “weak” and “immature” for “letting Romeo kiss her” the first time they met. Madame Banda then seized the opportunity to talk about the dangers of contracting HIV from sexual intercourse with a stranger. In this school, even a lesson on a sixteenth century English play could become a lecture about morality and HIV in twenty-first century Malawi. The school directors and Madame Banda drew on Girl Up resources and themes around the lost opportunities that HIV and early motherhood represent in club meetings to implore the girls not to have relationships with boys. When I asked the girls what they learnt at Girl Up club meetings, one of the quieter girls who did not wish to speak took a pen and post-it note and wrote, “how me control my self for boys.”

The girls did not seem to question this focus of Girl Up club. The narrative of risk and girls’ sexuality seemed self-evident to them, as demonstrated in the following extract.

- Teresa: If you, if you go to school and you having se- a relationship with the boys and he’ll give you pregnant and you have AIDS so you cannot achieve your goals.
- RW: Uh [pause] yeah
- Teresa: You can stop school.

Teresa stops short of saying the word “sex,” but her message is clear: sexual relationships with boys lead to pregnancy and HIV. They not only internalised this message, but some of the girls even took it upon themselves to teach it to the younger girls, as shown in the following extract:

Chikondi: After they come in the girl club at our club, meaning the young ladies like this one is very young, at this age so she’s ten eleven twelve oi

Chiyembezeko: Thirteen.

RW: Thirteen.

Chiyembezeko: Yeah

Chikondi: Can you allow a man to pregnate you

Chiyembezeko: [No

Chikondi: [No can you be in a relationship, you will finish school so as these ladies, as small ladies are hearing about a girl club about how a girl can do, can can can do it so they will have all information [about these bad things

Mayamiko: [They will have confidence

Chikondi: Yeah they will have confidence and they will reach their goals.

Chikondi’s question, “Can you allow a man to pregnate you?” is a rhetorical one and she does not wait for a response, instead continuing even as Chiyembezeko tries to answer. It is a direct, almost accusing, question that conveys the horror of “allowing” a man to impregnate her. She and Mayamiko conclude with statements about empowering the younger girls, or “small ladies,” because they will become more confident and be able to reach their goals. However, this is only after an exchange that seems more like disciplining than encouraging Chiyembezeko. The older girls have internalised a discourse in which girls are the gatekeepers of sexual encounters and must be careful not to “allow” a boy to impregnate her. A recent household survey found that forty percent of girls aged 12 to 19 in Malawi with experience of sex had not consented to their first sexual encounter

(Hayes, 2013: 356). However, the Girl Up club girls largely reproduced discourses that see it as a girl's individual responsibility to manage her sexuality and her body.

The girls told me that parents were mostly supportive of them attending Girl Up club during their lunch break because when they were at Girl Up club, as Fredah explained, "there is no time to talk with the boys." Recent research shows that parents and teachers in Malawi overstate the rate at which girls drop out of school due to pregnancy, with schoolgirl pregnancy actually a relatively rare occurrence and teenage pregnancy most likely to occur within marriage (Grant, 2012; Kamwendo, 2014: 87). However, teenage pregnancy "serves as a distraction" from issues such as extreme poverty or simply lack of interest in education and the general consensus about the high level of risk leads parents to express very gendered expectations about the behaviour of their children and consequences for their academic attainment, expressing concern that daughters – but not sons – are not able to juggle both a romantic relationship and their school studies (ibid: 75-9). What is interesting about this research is that parents expressed a greater concern about the risk of pregnancy than of contracting HIV (ibid: 81), which suggests a preoccupation with the visible signs of adolescent sexuality and shame that might be associated with them, over perhaps girls' health and wellbeing. This mirrors postfeminist discourses about teenage pregnancy in Northern societies, which frequently focus on the supposed social ills it causes and rarely centre a girl's wellbeing (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010).

However, the girls themselves, whilst embracing discourses around sexuality and managing risk, framed doing so in terms of prioritising themselves and their own health. The UN Development Programme estimates that HIV prevalence in those aged between 15 and 49 years in Malawi is 9.1 percent (UNDP, nd a). Research conducted by the Guttmacher Institute in partnership with the University of Malawi estimates that between six and 18 percent of maternal deaths in Malawi are as a result of complications arising from clandestine abortions, with abortion being illegal in any

circumstances other than if there is a threat to the mother's life (Guttmacher Institute, 2017).

Perhaps this is why girls told me that the information they learnt at Girl Up could save their lives.

Melina: I think when you are educated, you do some or you, or you do anything that you wouldn't achieve if not

RW: Mm

Melina: Yes.

[Pause]

Thokozani: It will also help us to protect our life.

[...]

RW: So, education protects your life from danger

Thokozani: Yeah

RW: What kind of dangers

Thokozani: To get pregnant.

Chikondi: Also, we teach each other how we can we can avoid HIV and AIDS

RW: Uh huh

Chikondi: Yeah cos like, I'm still young I'm just eighteen so if I take HIV AIDS, no more years to come I will not live long.

Gladys: A boy tell a girl that pregnant, tell her abortion

RW: Ah

Gladys: Or refuse.

[Pause]

RW: Ah so sometimes boys tell girls

Gladys: Yeah

Ruby: They tell girls to abortion

[Pause]

RW: And is that, is that bad, when the boys tell the girls [pause] that they should have an abortion is that a bad thing or a good thing

Gladys: [It's not good

Ruby: [Bad bad thing [pause] that, that girl maybe she dead, because of abortion. [Pause]
So bad.

In the first extract, we were not even discussing the issue of relationships with boys, but rather the benefits of education, when Thokozani contributed that education about how not to get pregnant can be lifesaving. In the third, a discussion about why relationships with boys were not encouraged in Malawian schools turned quickly to the topic of abortion. Being aware of the strict laws around abortion in Malawi and of the prevalence of conservative social attitudes on sexuality, I was unsure whether to ask the girls their opinions on abortion. I left a fourteen second gap in the hope that they might volunteer this information. When I did eventually ask, the girls' first reaction was to stress the danger to a girl's life. While they did go on to also talk about the unborn baby, this came later in the conversation. Although the girls did embrace discourses of individual responsibility in managing their sexuality, questions of morality rarely entered into discussions on girls' bodies. Rather, they focused on the practical issues of avoiding the prevalent and life-limiting illness of HIV and of avoiding the risks of pregnancy and childbirth or abortion. They were critical of boys' role in all of these risks and lamented the fact that boys were quick to abandon their girlfriends when such issues arose. Yet for them, hope was to be found in educating themselves and keeping away from boys. While the Girl Up discourse stresses the lost economic investment of early motherhood and conservative discourses in Malawi stress moral concerns about premarital sex, the girls themselves focus on concerns about their health and wellbeing.

While Girl Up club could be seen as somewhere where conservative discourses about constraining the girls' sexuality were reproduced, it was also an opportunity for them to discuss issues concerning their bodies. This has been mentioned earlier in relation to menstruation but was also evident during a session of the club I observed and took part in on HIV. The morning of the club meeting, one of the school directors asked me if I would like to lead part of the session about HIV, how it is transmitted and its impact. I declined. Throughout my time at the school, I was regularly asked by teachers and students alike why I was not teaching lessons there. There was an assumption that as an "mzungu," or white person, this was something I would be capable of. I repeatedly stressed that I was not a qualified teacher and so I would leave education to the Malawian teaching staff. However, on this occasion I eventually changed my mind because the session I was being asked to teach – on HIV transmission and prevention – was a topic that I spent four years delivering workshops on in schools in the UK as a member of the education team at the British Red Cross before starting my PhD. It had been my job to teach this information to young people in the UK in a way that stressed biological facts and that aimed to avoid, as much as possible, questions of morality and stigma. I felt confident that I could lead the session not because I was an "mzungu," but because this was a workshop I was genuinely qualified to deliver. Indeed, when approaching schools in the first instance I had offered to deliver an educational workshop or workshops based on my areas of expertise if it might be of use to the school community as a thank you for their participation in the project and the UK school also took me up on this offer. I told the directors, however, that I would hand over to them for the section on the impact of HIV, because I was unfamiliar with the Malawian context. Amongst other activities, I put a list on the blackboard of actions, ranging from holding hands and kissing, to sharing needles or unprotected sex, and asked the girls to come up one by one and wipe the ones that do not transmit HIV off the board. This was an activity that I knew from experience young people in UK schools really struggle to do. The girls in Malawi, however, got it right first time. They were incredibly well educated on the issue.

When I asked how HIV transmission could be prevented, the club president put her hand up and replied, “condoms,” to which Madame Banda shouted, “not for you!” She told the girls they should not have sex with boys at all because eventually, boys would tire of condoms and demand sex without one and the girls would contract HIV anyway. One of the directors stood up and explained that while the teachers believed that abstinence was the best way for the girls to protect themselves from HIV, they also knew that realistically many of the girls would have sex before they had finished school. If this was the case, he said, then it was vital to use condoms to protect themselves. The message of the session was strikingly similar to the picture of a Girl Up session in Liberia on the website, featuring a poster which read “If you must have sex, use condoms to prevent HIV” (Girl Up, nd f). The Girl Up club at this school certainly drew on, and did nothing to challenge, individualistic discourses that see girls as responsible for sexual experiences – and any unwanted consequences for their health – that take place in deeply unequal circumstances. The two male directors and Madame Banda drew on Girl Up materials and discourses to make the case that girls should abstain from sex until after they had finished their education. Their portrayal of the consequences of pre-marital sex was bleak and the emphasis was placed not only on the impact on the girl herself, but also on how these ‘choices’ would affect her family and wider society. While the girls themselves accepted responsibility for managing their own bodies, their focus was on keeping themselves healthy. They shared their concerns for themselves and their peers about the dangers of childbirth and abortions and the life-limiting impact of HIV. Thanks to Girl Up club, they were informed about their bodies and wanted to take control of their sexual and reproductive health.

Conclusions

The girls in Lilongwe did reproduce neoliberal, individualistic discourses that see girls as having incredible potential, but also being particularly “at-risk” of not reaching that potential. In many ways, they were also willing to take on the responsibility for making their communities a better place for girls to live. However, they did so in a spirit of feminist solidarity with other girls and with a

sense that girls collectively, not individual girls, could make this change happen. As Chikondi says, girls will “stand on **our** own.” They longed to break free from dependence on parents or men, particularly when those parents or men were failing to meet their needs, but they did not see themselves as individually responsible for making that happen. Girl Up, for them, was about girls coming together to support one another, along with the support of adult allies such as their teachers, to improve the lives of girls. This is a theme that Chikondi returned to again later:

Chikondi: Alright, I can look we see the future

RW: Uh huh

Chikondi: Yeah it’s true we did see the future, cos at last there’s no future, cos women we were taking like those down level but after the girl club has come, and we are together and after we are together we can make it

Fatsani: Yeah

Chikondi: Cos we have start working on it, then after two to three years the girls will rise up

Fatsani: Yeah

Mayamiko: Yeah.

For Chikondi, thanks to Girl Up club there is now a future for girls, who will no longer accept a lower status or “down level” to boys. These are not the words of a girl who has internalised a narrative that sees her as individually responsible for her own future and the future of her family, and as personally to blame if she fails to lift herself and others out of poverty. Rather, this is a girl who thinks that for too long, women have had to accept a “down level” status, but now, thanks to Girl Up and the togetherness it creates, “we can make it.” It is not just a promise to work hard to make change, it is a promise that girls together will “rise up.”

Chapter 9 – “We’re Only Kids”: Northern Girl Up Members and the Spectacularisation of Girlhood

While the Girl Up discourse calls upon girls in the Global South to assume responsibilities for themselves, their families and their communities, promising great economic benefits when they do so, it calls upon girls in the Global North to use their spectacular talents and abilities to save the world. As discussed in relation to Girl Up promotional materials in Chapter 5, in the Girl Up discourse spectacular girls single-handedly take on political institutions, found charitable organisations and cross continents in order to raise money. In Girl Up materials, the Northern girl is by default spectacular because of her assumed success at school, her talent and intelligence and her participation in the campaign, which will help to save the world. While there are striking similarities in the discourses that position Southern girls as individually responsible for saving their communities and Northern girls as capable of saving the world, they produce very different ‘girl’ subjects. In both discourses, girls must achieve great things individually, with no need for support from teachers, parents or their communities. Both discourses adopt a celebratory tone about girls’ abilities. Both are rooted in the neoliberal language of opportunity and choice. However, the instrumentalist discourses discussed in the previous chapter emphasise a Southern girl’s responsibilities while spectacular discourses discussed here emphasise a Northern girl’s power. The former positions girls as overlooked by policy makers and as “untapped” resources (Calkin, 2015b: 5; Hickel, 2014: 1363; Roberts, 2012: 95), while the latter positions them as powerful forces to be reckoned with. This chapter focuses primarily on Northern girls’ negotiation of spectacular discourses.

In all three fieldwork countries, girls had to some extent embraced discourses of female success, although it is not clear from the data that they saw this as particularly exceptional or “spectacular,” but rather as evidence of girls gaining an equal footing with boys. In many other ways, however, they did not embrace spectacular discourses. They frequently expressed self-doubt,

openly discussed what they perceived to be their weaknesses, questioned what they were able to achieve with their Girl Up club and its activities, identified many barriers that prevented them from achieving their goals and talked a great deal about the support networks that they believe are necessary to help girls succeed. Furthermore, they were critical of girls who take part in Girl Up only because they see it as an opportunity to enhance their own skills, rather than through a commitment to justice and equality. I argue, therefore, that despite the pleasure they take in positive narratives of girls' potential to achieve spectacular things, the girls do not reproduce individualistic, spectacular discourses that would constitute them as the saviours of the world. Furthermore, the girls are highly critical of barriers that prevent them from achieving their goals and keen to acknowledge the role of supportive adults in helping them to overcome them. The girls themselves did not identify spectacularisation as a discourse they were negotiating, nor did they explicitly critique it. Rather, in reading against the grain, I have identified many instances that show that their relationship to spectacular discourses was complex and that they certainly did not reproduce them consistently.

“I Could Use My Talent Here”: Spectacular Discourses and Participation in Girl Up

Some, but by no means all, Northern girls did emphasise their own abilities and how they could apply them to changing the world through participating in Girl Up. Some of the girls in the US and the UK told me that they had become involved in Girl Up because they felt it fitted their talents for a particular activity such as fundraising or organising events. For example, in one of the independent schools in New York, Sydney told me that she had been encouraged to join by a teacher because “I could use my talent here and like help other people.” In the same group, Anna explained, “me and my mom have a knack for fundraising and planning events so I decided why not join.” However, within the same group, Riley said that she joined because “you didn’t really need many skills just you

just had to want to help,” suggesting that she did not feel that she had any particular relevant talents, but simply the right attitude for Girl Up.

In the UK, Daniela said she felt that she was able to contribute to Girl Up during cake sales because “I’m a good seller.” Later on, when I asked her what she hoped to do after school, she explained that she thought she could use her skills during a gap year to help people in the Global South:

Daniela: I dunno, I’ll probably [pause] still try to get involved in helping people and just people, not just women cos I feel like in Africa and stuff and other places [pause] men need as much help [pause] like you know some places are just [poverty

Lauren: [So you see what [you wanna

Daniela: [I think like

Lauren: Remain charitable

Daniela: Yeah [just like

Lauren: [Yeah

Daniela: I’d love to go to like places, I don’t know like Malawi and like be in a group and like [help

Lauren: [Like a like a [mis- like a missionary

Daniela: [Help like first aid cos I’m gonna do first aid in science or whatever, I can probably do that.

Lauren: Yeah

Daniela: Help.

Sophie: Girls.

Daniela: I wanna do that.

Here, Daniela seems sure that learning some first aid during her science A Levels would be enough knowledge to go and practice some kind of first aid or medical health in a Southern location, such as

Malawi. Although Lauren and Sophie seem to agree, with their utterances of “yeah” and their attempts to finish Daniela’s sentences, Lauren frequently interrupts Daniela before she has finished making her point, either with an assumption about what she is going to say (“like a missionary?”) or to finish Daniela’s point before she has had a chance to make it (“what you wanna remain charitable?”). At several points in the focus group, Lauren questioned Daniela on her opinions, including when Daniela stated that she did not identify as feminist because of her Christianity. Lauren asked several questions about why Daniela felt the two were mutually exclusive and concluded “Mm that’s interesting and I don’t understand it but that’s OK.” In this context, Lauren interprets Daniela’s confident claims that she would be able to help “in Africa” as meaning that she feels a calling to go and preach her faith there. Although she does not challenge Daniela – who is Romanian and has English as a second language – on her disassociation with feminism or on her desire to go to Africa, she interrupts and questions her. This confidence in one’s own abilities seemed to cause discomfort for the two girls from the UK in this group and straight afterwards, in response to the same question about what she wanted to do after school, Sophie mocked herself for having aspired to change the world. She said, “I used to be like I’m going to be the head of the UN which I don’t think is an actual thing [laughs] to be honest but I obviously thought that was what I was going to be.” She laughs at her own former aspirations and her lack of knowledge about whether the role she dreamt of even exists.

Similarly, the girls had different views about whether a group of girls could actually change the world. At the Catholic independent school in New York, Gabriella said she thought that there was “this whole wave of girls who are gonna come and they’re gonna like do things,” while Nicola agreed that, “we as a generation are gonna have such an impact on girls in general.” However, the girls in the UK groups were much more sceptical about what they could achieve. This was true even of the girls on the Girl Up organising committee, with Bethan saying, “the fact is, saying could you honestly make life better for eighty-five percent of the girls in the world and to be honest you

probably can't and it's doing what you can isn't it." Once again in the Year 12 group, Sophie and Lauren did not share Daniela's optimism about being in a position to change the world:

Sophie: Cos it's like what can you achieve when [you're like

Lauren: [Yeah

Sophie: Sitting in a classroom in North Wales.

[Laughter]

While all of the girls were highly critical of people who understood that problems or issues existed, yet did nothing to try to change them, many of them also rejected the idea that they alone were capable of coming up with the solutions.

The girls in the UK in particular were frequently self-deprecating, making jokes at their own expense or questioning the impact of their activities as part of Girl Up. Sophie described herself as "behind on everything" academically, to which Lauren replied, "Yeah I'm failing Maths." Bethan declared that "my only academic strength is not shutting up." The oldest group told me about their experiences of giving assemblies to younger students in their school about Girl Up and one of them – Leah – discussed why she felt that her own participation in the talk was hypocritical:

Leah: Cos it was just like a kind of it was an add on to what they were already talking about like child [poverty like sweat shops and stuff

Chloe: [Yeah the assembly was about like child slavery wasn't it.

[Lines omitted]

Chloe: Day of the [international day of the child

Leah: [It's quite ironic cos I was wearing three pieces of Primark clothing whilst I was giving the talk on it.

[Laughter]

[Pause]

Leah: [Laughs] Yeah

Charlotte: [I think
 Chloe: [You're actually a disgrace [to me
 Leah: [I am
 Chloe: Now.
 Leah: I know.

[Laughter]

If she aspired to be seen as the spectacular girl in the Girl Up resources who is going to change the world one day, Leah could have kept this detail to herself. She could have emphasised the courage and eloquence it took to speak to a large group of children from her school and the impact it will have had on them. Instead, however, she highlights what she sees as the irony of speaking on children's rights while wearing the clothes of a brand that has been linked to child labour (Hopkins, 2008). The other girls' laughter suggests that they understand that irony, although they do not judge her harshly and Chloe's "you're actually a disgrace to me" was said in jest and to raise another laugh from the group. At another point in the focus group, Leah also describes the impact that giving multiple assemblies to younger students has had on her. Again, instead of emphasising her talent for giving such talks, Leah's first response is to describe them as "those lovely assemblies that put me off public speaking." She goes on to explain that she feels she did a particularly bad job of the talks and therefore the experience has made her feel less confident about public speaking overall. Some of the other girls in the group did not even attend these events as they felt unable to stand in front of that many students and speak. Far from the impossible achievements of the spectacular girl, these girls' experiences highlight their own perceived failings as well as their talents. Instead of emphasising the new skills they have learnt thanks to taking on these challenges, they are happy to admit that sometimes, the main effect was to put them off ever attempting them again.

Girls also told me about a general sense of apathy, both about education and about causes such as Girl Up, amongst their peers and even occasionally amongst Girl Up members. Unlike the

almost impossibly perfect Northern girl in *Connecting the Dots*, the girls told me about times when they or their peers did not try particularly hard at something because they could not be bothered. For example, the girls in the UK told me about how hard it was to get anyone, including Girl Up members, to dress up for their Halloween event or to attend lunchtime meetings. Unlike the spectacular girl, Sophie is keen to stress that girls in the UK sometimes struggle to find the motivation to change the world in their lunchbreak: “It’s like, do you really wanna go to Girl Up or do you wanna go to Tesco [laughs] you know.” Once again, she is highlighting that which is not particularly spectacular about the Girl Up club and its members; that they sometimes miss meetings for very everyday reasons, such as going to the supermarket. Similarly, Katie in Year 11 stressed that a lot of people don’t come to Girl Up meetings “because they can’t be bothered.”

In the international school in Lilongwe,²¹ the two girls’ initial confidence in their understanding of issues such as child marriage and their ability to help solve them was shattered by a revelation from their teacher that it was an issue affecting girls in their own school, something they had previously been unaware of. This might explain why later in the focus group, they did not seem very confident that girls are the right people to be trying to solve violations of girls’ rights:

RW: But I’m just wondering like, more broadly speaking so what the you know what the UN Foundation are doing with Girl Up is they’re tryina get girls to take on these issues [pause] what do you think of that as a strategy, like are girls the right people to be tackling them or

Shrimayi: Yes, because we understand what they’re going through [well

Ahadi: [No we don’t understand

Shrimayi: No, we don’t understand cos we’ve just been smacked in the face with new information.

²¹ As discussed in Chapter 4, I conceptualise the two girls in the international school in Lilongwe as Northern even though they are located in the Global South and one is Malawian while the other is British but has lived in Malawi all her life.

[Laughter]

[Lines omitted]

Ahadi: The reality is it's extremely hard to do so it could be like you know, this almost seems superficial, like when you actually sit down and think about what girls, like you know what it, what it would take to like, you know [completely

Shrimayi: [Yeah

Ahadi: Reverse the [situation

Shrimayi: [This mentality.

Ahadi: To make it look like we [pause] are, we see a better future.

Shrimayi begins by asserting that girls are the right people to tackle issues such as child marriage, but then interrupts herself ("well") at the same time that Ahadi interrupts to counter that they do not fully understand the challenges some girls face. Shrimayi agrees and finishes the point by highlighting how shocked they have been with new information on an issue they thought they fully understood. Once again, the girls' self-deprecation is followed by laughter. Ahadi goes on to discuss how "extremely hard" it would be to tackle these issues and Shrimayi agrees. These examples show that the girls were not afraid to describe themselves as at times apathetic, at times lazy or simply to admit that their Girl Up club might not change the world and their readiness to laugh about these qualities shows that they did not judge other girls harshly for them either. They did not hold themselves or their peers to unrealistic standards of spectacular girlhood.

Girls Negotiating Selfie Humanitarianism

As discussed in the conceptual framework in Chapter 3, Koffman, Orgad and Gill identified "selfie humanitarianism" as a significant concept in relation to Girl Up (2015). They argue that in the Girl Up discourse, "sisterly solidarity with disadvantaged girls is figured less in terms of redistribution or social justice than in terms of a makeover of subjectivity for all concerned" (ibid: 158). They give examples that include corporate sponsors of Girl Up offering to donate money to Girl Up-funded

education campaigns in the Global South every time a Girl Up member in the Global North posted a selfie on Twitter with their hashtag and a campaign that involved Northern girls buying bracelets designed by Ivanka Trump, knowing that some of the money would go towards girls' education in the Global South. They argue that their concept "captures the turning of the humanitarian gaze away from those in need and onto the individual donor; and it highlights the reframing of 'helping others' in terms of entrepreneurial and narcissistic self-work" (ibid: 158). This self-work includes the many opportunities to enhance their skills and boost their CVs that Girl Up promotes to its Northern members, all so that a Southern girl can get a basic education. In the Girl Up discourse, the Southern girl's disempowerment is an opportunity for the Northern girl to empower herself even further. This is portrayed as a "win-win" situation where everybody benefits (Calkin, 2015a: 297; Moeller, 2014: 583). While the Northern Girl Up members I spoke to did sometimes acknowledge that the opportunities available to them from participating in the campaign were a motivating factor in joining, they did not see this as something worth celebrating. If they had embraced spectacular discourses, they might have described this motivation as yet more evidence of their own abilities in planning for the future and gaining the necessary experience for a dazzling career ahead. Instead, they seemed reluctant or even embarrassed to discuss the benefits to themselves of participating because it revealed that they were not entirely motivated by altruism.

In the international school in Lilongwe, Ahadi and Shrimayi were on the cusp of setting up a Girl Up club. Teachers had suggested they apply to an upcoming Girl Up camp to be held in Malawi because it would reflect well on them when they later came to apply for university. After reading up about Girl Up, however, Shrimayi decided that she wanted to do more than simply apply for the camp and she approached the school counsellor about setting up a club. During the first half of the focus group, when the school counsellor was present, Shrimayi and Ahadi were both keen to distance themselves from their teacher's rationale for setting up the club:

- Teacher: Shrimayi had come to me, like that morning and asked for a meeting, cos they wanna do it for their CAS²²
- Shrimayi: Well in general, not just for the CAS
- Ahadi: [Yeah
- Teacher: [Yeah but I mean great, and then [...].

In this extract, the teacher confidently asserts that the girls are starting a Girl Up club in order to fulfil one of the mandatory elements of the International Baccalaureate. In a school that prides itself on the all-round education it gives to students, where students must juggle multiple commitments and opportunities alongside their academic study, this may well seem to the teacher like a logical rationale for taking on yet another extracurricular activity. These two girls were already both involved in the school's Model UN team and were both achieving excellent results academically. So, when the girls interject to stress that they wanted to join Girl Up "in general," not just because it would help them fulfil the requirements of the qualification, the teacher does not seem to see it as an important distinction. She briefly acknowledges their motivation to help other girls as "great" and then continues with what she was already saying. While some girls may have been motivated to join Girl Up because of the opportunities it would offer them and how it would look on future university applications, this is within a context of immense pressure from schools to be doing as much as possible to fill out their CVs. The girls themselves, however, were keen to stress that this was not their only motivation.

In the UK, the girls were embarrassed to admit that their own career advancement was a factor in taking part; however, in more than one group they seemed to feel it was necessary to acknowledge that. In the younger group, Hannah told me, "it sounds horrible to say that like, a benefit to this is that it'll look good on your CV and obviously that's not the reasons we're doing it

²² The "creativity, activity, service" component of the International Baccalaureate, one of "three essential elements that every student must complete" (International Baccalaureate Organisation, nd).

but that is a benefit.” Hannah is almost ashamed at the “horrible” idea that you would only care about other girls if there was some benefit to you. In the older group, Bethan felt strongly that this was a topic that needed to be discussed in my presence:

Bethan: There is one big reason tha- for joining for Girl Up that no one’s mentioned and I’m probably gonna say it and [everyone’s

Leah: [Yeah

Bethan: Gonna look at me being annoyed, UCAS,²³ cos

RW: [Laughs] Right

Leah: Yes.

[Laughter]

Bethan: Cos it’s it’s the university applications, cos I mean I think I’ve I’ve I I mean I I I, I’d be, I’d be I think it’d be wrong if you if that wasn’t acknowledged that [it’s it it it yeah

Leah: [Yes

Chloe: [It’s the elephant in the room.

Bethan: Yeah it kind of is a bit.

Bethan later explained that she raised the issue because she did not think it would be right if I went away from the school with the impression that UCAS applications and CVs were not a motivation for the girls at all. She expects raising this topic to “annoy” her fellow Girl Up members but, in fact, they seem to agree. Leah even anticipates what Bethan is going to say and interrupts with an encouraging “yeah” before she has even finished saying it. She follows this up with another encouraging “yes” after Bethan says the word “UCAS.” Even Chloe, the club president, has no objections to Bethan’s point and admits that UCAS is “the elephant in the room.” This highlights that for these girls, the benefits of participating in Girl Up for themselves were not something to boast about, contrary to Girl Up’s proud claims about “empowering” Northern girls through giving

²³ The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service.

them the opportunity to help Southern girls. In fact, they seem embarrassed to admit they are not solely motivated by altruism. In many ways, this is a rejection of “selfie humanitarianism” and of spectacular discourses, in which the focus should be on them, their achievements and their careers, and in which any benefits to the Southern girl are almost an incidental by-product. It is almost a reversal of this discourse in that it seems that for them, the benefits of joining Girl Up are an incidental by-product of their motivation to take an interest in the lives of their Southern counterparts.

Girls’ Interpretation of the Barriers to Their Success

One way in which the girls’ interpretations directly challenged spectacular discourses of girlhood was in their questioning of whether girls their age in the Global North could really change the world. In the following paragraphs, I explore this in relation to three different concerns they had: their status as “only kids,” the many barriers they faced in carrying out their Girl Up activities and the support they had received or felt they needed from adults. All of these concerns challenge the idea that girls alone can and should solve issues ranging from child marriage to the inaccessibility of education in many countries around the world.

Unlike the girls in the Girl Up materials whose actions ultimately change the world, the girls in this study were keen to stress that there was a limit to what they could achieve because, as Anna in New York explained, “we’re only kids and we’re only doing this for one hour every week.” This was a frustration that was felt strongly in the US and the UK. Girl Up emails and resources set the girls up to think that they could make big changes with small acts and they struggled to reconcile this with what they saw as being the actual impact of their activities. At the other school in New York, Gabriella explained, “you want things to change but it’s so hard, we’re like young girls [...] I feel like I can’t really do anything right now.” Interestingly, one of the critiques of spectacular discourses is that they set unrealistic expectations of girls and leave them feeling they are to blame if they are not able to meet them. Indeed, Emily Bent’s work with girl activists engaging with the United Nations

shows that not being able to live up to spectacular goals, because of institutional constraints placed on them, was ultimately disempowering for the girls (2016). Gabriella's words do suggest a real sense of disappointment or even disempowerment at not being able to achieve the things that Girl Up campaign promises girls can. However, the girls were very clear that this was not because of their own lack of ability, but rather because they were still operating within structures that marginalised them because of their age. In the UK, Hannah speculated that "one of the reasons that people don't come is cos they think it's just student-organised you know it's not serious." She felt that having a youth-led club was less successful because within the school, any activity not led by a teacher was not taken seriously. She went on, "I think people dismiss you a lot when you're a lot younger." Even Chloe, the UK club president, was pessimistic about what they could achieve: "obviously we're just like high school kids and we can't really change the world or whatever." The Year 11 group felt that adults dismissed them as "young and hippy," while the Year 12 group complained that when young people get involved in politics, adults think "oh they'll grow out of it." So, while the girls were disappointed not to live up to the grand expectations of the Girl Up discourse, they identified their marginalised position within societies that still do not take young people's participation in politics seriously as a factor in this.

The girls also identified many other barriers to succeeding with their Girl Up clubs, again often linked to adults, their perceptions and the hierarchical school structures they found themselves in. When I asked what the barriers were, Leah summarised them succinctly as "time, money and the usual limitations of our generation." Time was a recurring theme for all of the groups, with the difficulties of juggling academic pressures and extracurricular clubs playing a big role in limiting the girls' activities. At the Catholic school in New York, Gabriella explained that the group had struggled to find time to meet: "it's kind of hard since we only meet we don't meet as often as a lot of us would like to unfortunately, just cos of conflicting schedules." Similarly, in the UK, when I met with the Year 13 girls in January, they told me that they would not be able to be very active as a club over the coming months because of the pressures of their exams.

Leah: We could do a bit more but at the same time it's trying to keep A Levels up [whilst

Charlotte: [Yeah

Leah: Keeping [laughs] active.

Charlotte: [Yeah yeah

Chloe: [Oh yeah I think our group's not gonna be as active this, like [these terms

Leah: [These two

Charlotte: Yeah

Chloe: These two terms just cos we've got so much to do, we can hand over to like year twelve a little bit and

Leah: Yeah

Chloe: Maybe to year eleven but [they've got more exams than we have

Leah: [But that's if they come

Chloe: Erm [pause] but yeah I think, probably our peak time's gone now.

As a club run by Year 13, 12 and 11 students within the UK education system, there were no members of the club that did not have important exams approaching in the summer that would have long-term implications for their study and careers. The Year 13 girls are simultaneously keen to "hand over" and also to avoid overburdening the younger students who have "more exams than we have." The result is resigning themselves to the idea that their most productive time as organisers of the club had already passed.

Money came up frequently. In the state-funded school in New Jersey, the girls were not able to host the after school film nights or talent shows they wanted to, because school rules insisted on a security guard being present and the girls had calculated that the cost of hiring one would likely negate any profit made from the event to donate to Girl Up. In the UK, the girls' idea of going on a sponsored walk up a nearby mountain had never come to fruition because there was no budget for hiring a minibus. While spectacular discourses of girlhood serve to erase the

socioeconomic factors that mean that spectacular achievements are easier for some girls than others, the girls' comments during these focus groups show that they are acutely aware of these factors. This was one more way that they did not blame themselves for failing to change the world, no matter how frustrated they felt at not living up to the ideals of Girl Up.

The final of Leah's three barriers was the "usual limitations of our generation," which I understood to mean their marginalisation from decision-making processes because of their status as minors. This came through in many different settings in the way that the girls' activities were limited by school rules beyond their control. Again, they were philosophical about their own achievements and at times highly critical of school administrations who they saw as placing unnecessary bureaucratic barriers on their attempts at running events for charity. In New Jersey, Madison felt that one of the reasons the club had not got up and running as quickly as they had hoped was the girls' inexperience at running such a club. She explained, "we're all kind of trying to erm get the foundations and basics of running a club, erm so it's kind of been difficult but I think that you know we've learned a lot from the experience." She is keen to stress that the girls are learning and she did not see this lack of experience as a personal flaw, but rather as an inevitable consequence of the girls' age and status.

Many of the girls felt that Girl Up was giving them the opportunity to take on responsibilities that they had not been given before and for this reason, they did not seem to place much pressure on themselves to immediately thrive at it. Paradoxically, however, the girls' ability to carry out those responsibilities was limited by their lower status within school and the lack of responsibility they were allowed to take on there. This is evident in the girls' inability in New Jersey to organise a cake sale in case they were seen to be competing with the private catering company running the school canteen and they were critical of the school administration for this policy. In the UK, the girls were equally critical of the school leadership for not allowing the Year 11 girls to participate in the fancy-

dress fundraisers, because only the headteacher was allowed to arrange non-uniform days for specific charities:

Charlotte: Just the only barrier really is just being A Level students isn't it really.

Chloe: I don't think it's like, when we talk about barriers it's not barriers for the club itself it's for us [and our

Leah: [Yeah

Charlotte: [Yeah

Chloe: And our general situation like, we wanted to do a lower school [pause] jumper, Christmas jumper day but the barrier for that was [name of head teacher] wasn't gonna let us do that at all like no one was allowed to do that so it wasn't like Girl Up aren't allowed to do it, it's no one's allowed to do it.

Once again, the girls were critical of what they perceived of as unnecessarily strict rules imposed by adults, which blocked their activities. Chloe's comments suggest she feels this is a barrier any student-led club would encounter and it is not specifically aimed at Girl Up. Rather, the problem is, as Charlotte says, "just being A Level students" and not having any power within the school hierarchy. The girls were very much aware of the limitations of what they could achieve and the barriers that they faced because of their age and marginalised status within school and wider societal hierarchies. Although evidently frustrated at this, they did not seem to see it as a failure on the part of their club or themselves.

The Support Networks Necessary to Run a Girl Up Club

A further way in which the girls challenged the spectacular discourses of girlhood was in emphasising the support networks necessary to run a Girl Up club. They generally felt that this support was lacking. As I have discussed elsewhere in this thesis, the girls were stigmatised for attending Girl Up club, especially by boys their age, but sometimes even by teachers. Overall there was a real sense of

frustration amongst the girls, especially in the UK and the US, that they did not get the support they deserved for their activities. While Girl Up emphasises that it is “by girls, for girls” (Girl Up, nd f), the Girl Up club members I spoke to were keen for greater involvement from adults. They were proud of having taken the initiative to get involved with a campaign of this kind, but they wanted the support of teachers to help make their clubs a success. Hannah in the UK felt that “it’s a lot easier to get stuff done” with teachers on board, while Lucy felt that the teachers could do a lot more by “just advocating it.”

Where teachers were involved, the girls were grateful for their support. In all of the schools, a teacher was involved in some form in order for the meetings to take place. Girl Up suggests that a teacher act as “advisor” to clubs based in schools. In the township school of Lilongwe, it was the school’s directors, being some of the few people in the school community with access to the internet, who had found out about Girl Up and registered a club. In other schools, girls themselves had found the website, decided to set up a club and approached a teacher to act as their “advisor” and help them to get school approval to hold meetings during school time. In these schools, all of the “advisors” were female. They were all teachers of arts and humanities subjects, apart from one who was the school counsellor. From the brief conversations I had with these teachers, it was clear to me that the girls had strategically picked teachers they knew to be feminists. They were also teachers who supported the idea of student-led initiatives. Sometimes, these teachers were present during focus groups and I was able to observe the relationship between them and the girls, which seemed to me to be one of support and respect. At the Catholic school in New York, the teacher explained how she became involved with Girl Up:

- Teacher: One of our other er club leadership folks approached me and asked me to erm come on as the advisor moderator whatever we’re calling it so
- RW: So is that cos like does every club need to have like a staff member who supports
- Lucia: Yeah

RW: And right

Lucia: We're really lucky to have [name of teacher]

Teacher: My gosh I love spending time with you girls.

Amidst the apathy and sometimes outright hostility the girls faced in school, they were deeply grateful to these teachers who not only supported the club's activities, but gave time out of their busy schedules to attend meetings – as required by school rules – and to champion their cause to other teachers.

In the UK, the teacher responsible for Girl Up club joined us for some of the focus groups. When the girls were describing the hostility they felt towards the club in the school, she joined in:

Teacher: Cos my name's attached to it obviously cos you have to have someone over eighteen so as soon as it comes up all the members of staff just look at me as if, I've had comments.

Chloe: Fight them all miss.

[Laughter]

RW: Really

Leah: Fight them miss we'll help you.

The girls and their teacher share a laugh together. The girls urge her to challenge sexism within the school and even offer to do it together. Although the suggesting of "fighting" the teachers who make derogatory comments about Girl Up is a joke, this extract does reveal a rapport with the teacher, who the girls feel able to joke with and who they see as an ally.

The girls in Lilongwe also saw their teachers as allies in challenging discrimination. In the following extract, I asked them whether they felt that the two male school directors were able to understand the challenges faced by girls in their community:

Ethel: Yeah [pause] [names of directors] can understand our challenges, because [pause]
what can I say.

[Pause]

Olivia: OK, [names of directors] they can understand our challenges because they have
seen a lot of girls who have find many dif- difficulties to continue their education

RW: Mm

Olivia: And they they know a lot of challenges that we girls face, so, they can help us

[Lines omitted]

Ethel: Yeah it's like [name of director] can understand our challenges because we have
some girls who lack school fees

RW: Mm

Ethel: But [name of director] can pay that girl's school fees and there's some girls who just
learn here without paying school fees.

The relationship between the girls and the directors was a different one to the girls and their teacher in the UK. In the UK, the teacher was not a member of the school management. The girls were also in sixth form, which in many schools and colleges in the UK allows a degree more autonomy to students, particularly in that they are allowed to choose what they study and independent learning in encouraged. It is unlikely that the teacher responsible for Girl Up would be responsible for disciplining these girls very often, if at all. However, the girls in Lilongwe are talking about the two directors of the school, who are responsible for the discipline of students and regularly sent students home or held them back as punishment for bad behaviour or missed homework. The girls did not joke with their teachers as readily perhaps as the girls in the UK. Nevertheless, they expressed admiration for these two men, who they knew were funding girls' education out of their own pockets by allowing some of the poorest girls to attend without paying full fees. They were keen to make me aware of how supportive and generous the directors were. As Aisha explained, "these teachers we have, we they are stand with us girls." Because of that support, she said, "we know we

challenge the boys.” In all three countries, Girl Up club members drew on the support of those teachers they found who did support their activities. They not only needed their support in order to have a club at school at all, but they also saw these teachers as allies in their wider attempts to challenge sexism within their schools.

Conclusions

The girls in this study are taking on impressive challenges, making changes within their communities and tackling discrimination. However, it would be impossible for them to do so without the support of adults, if for no other reason than that their status within a school as “student” or “child” means that they have to have at least one adult acting as “advisor” to their club in order to even be allowed to hold meetings. The girls themselves stress that they would like more adult involvement than this and that they see the lack of support from the community around them as a barrier preventing them from achieving more. Although some of the girls told me about their talents and how they were using them to contribute to Girl Up, many more spoke of the challenges they faced as part of Girl Up. They did not seem to feel the need to portray their participation in Girl Up as a resounding, spectacular success, nor did they feel that participation in Girl Up should be all about them and their achievements, and they were more than happy to acknowledge the role of supportive adults in the achievements that they had made. In challenging spectacular discourses of girlhood, feminist scholars seek to focus on “making visible the communities, partners and support systems central to girls’ exceptional success” (Bent, 2016: 117). While it is important to recognise girls’ strength and their potential to do great things, recent neoliberal discourses have taken this to the extreme in holding up individual girls as having single-handedly changed the world. For girlhood scholars, it is crucial to stress that “girls cannot on their own make the world a more respectful place for female youth” (Kearney, 2009: 22). This chapter demonstrates that girls themselves are keenly aware of the limitations to what they can achieve in combatting patriarchal norms too and are grateful to the supportive, feminist adults they see as helping them towards this goal.

Chapter 10 – “Connecting the Dots”? Bringing Girl Up Members Together across the North-South Divide

In Chapter 5 of this thesis I explore how Girl Up produces and reproduces discourses that see girlhood in the Global North and Global South as opposing subject positions; the former as characterised by opportunity, success, equality and consumption; the latter characterised by poverty, victimhood and disease. This is perhaps more evident in the Girl Up campaign than in many other campaigns, thanks to its emphasis on Northern girls as “sisters, saviours and ‘BFFs’ of their Southern counterparts” (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 161). Even as it stresses that Southern girls are “just like you” (Koffman and Gill, 2013: 95), Girl Up encourages the Northern girl to see herself as ‘empowered,’ generous and able, while depicting the Southern girl as voiceless, unskilled and grateful for any help she receives. While my analysis so far demonstrates how girls in the Global North did not see themselves as spectacular saviour figures who have every opportunity available to them and girls in the Global South did not see themselves as awaiting rescue, this chapter focuses on one representation the girls did not challenge so critically: that of the ‘other’ girl.

I begin by considering how girls in the Global North initially reproduced passive representations of Southern girls as victims. It was a discourse that was reproduced both by Northern girls towards the South and by the girls in Lilongwe towards their counterparts in the rural areas, or “villages,” of Malawi. Even the girls from the two schools in Lilongwe perceived themselves to be separated by a North-South divide that made contact between the international school and the school in a township seem impossible. I explore this theme in the second section, discussing the impossibility for club members of connecting with other girls through Girl Up. However, in the final section, I explore the impact of this research in creating links between the participants in the Global North and South that began to break down this North-South divide. With relatively small interventions, such as an exchange of emails or a Skype conversation, the girls’ perceptions changed

and the Northern girls began to interact with their Southern peers in an atmosphere of learning and mutual respect. While the discourse of oppositional girlhoods was the one the girls seemed to challenge least of all to begin with, my analysis shows that it was still ultimately very fragile in the face of meaningful conversations between girls in different contexts. I argue that with a small amount of contextual information, the girls were able to negotiate discursive constructions of passive Southern girls, just as they had previously criticised constructions of the Global North in the Girl Up discourse.

Girls' Perceptions of the 'Other' Girl

In her famous essay "Under Western Eyes," Chandra Talpade Mohanty identified the trope in Western feminist scholarship about the Global South of the "average third world woman," who "leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being 'third world' (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimised, etc.)" (1991: 56). The Southern girls depicted in Girl Up marketing materials conform to this "average third world woman" trope. Of the many depictions visible in Girl Up discourses, this was perhaps the one that was most reproduced by the girls participating in this study. In the following paragraphs, I discuss how Northern girls' talk about Southern girls, and how Lilongwean girls' talk about rural Malawian girls reproduced representations of the 'other' girl as poor, uneducated and voiceless.

Two of the three groups in the UK used temporal phrases in order to position the Global South as lagging behind the Global North. This resonates strongly with discourses that portray former colonies as further behind in the "natural process to development already completed by the West" (Yeğenoğlu, 1998: 98). The following extracts are from the Year 12 and Year 13 students.

Sophie: Did you see that thing about the gender pay gap staying until 20[69

Lauren: [69

Sophie: Ha- and like just imagine it like, in hundreds or yea- or like a hundred years, then like all these countries where they're sort of, you know

Lauren: [Yeah if if our pay gap isn't gonna

Sophie: [Pushed down and they're yeah

Lauren: Close till 2069 when are they gonna get

Daniela: Yeah

Lauren: Income equality.

Charlotte: Obviously there's still more work to do in our country, as well

Chloe: Mm mm

Charlotte: But around the world there's still, they're like a hundred years behind where we are now.

Chloe: Yeah there's a massive gap.

In both of these extracts, the girls bring up gender inequality, or the “work to do” in the UK. In this way they seem to be rejecting the oppositional girlhoods discourse. And yet, instead of making them question the wider discourse that positions Northern and Southern girlhoods as so different to one another, the fact that gender inequalities exist in the North leads them to conclude that the situation must be even worse in the South. In both extracts, the girls seem reluctant to actually name where they are talking about, instead using the phrases “all these countries where they're sort of you know,” and “around the world,” followed by “they.” This mirrors the vague imagery and language of Girl Up materials in depicting Southern girlhood. It could also, however, show a desire amongst the girls to avoid naming a particular region or country as lagging behind the Global North. Yet by avoiding seeming to pass judgement on any specific society or qualifying what kind of society they are talking about, the girls actually end up making even bigger generalisations about vast numbers of people and countries, depicting them as stuck further behind on an imagined timeline leading to the present-day North. While they challenged much about the girl power discourses

visible in the Girl Up campaign, they did not question the sweeping generalisations made about the Global South or girls therein.

Similarly, the girls made assumptions about the lives of girls in the South and the cultures they lived in. For example, in the following extract, the girls are talking about their desire to travel to another country to meet some of their peers.

Daniela: I wish we could actually go and visit like [a country though.

Sophie: [Yeah same.

Lauren: That would be good.

Daniela: You know to India or one of the places that erm

[Pause]

Sophie: [That's

Lauren: [But it's interesting because even like we'd go but then we'd also have to cover up as like out of respect and things.

Sophie: Yeah

Lauren: Like back to clothing again it's like simple things like, wh- what you want to wear

Daniela: I wouldn't mind if it means that I can connect with them.

Daniela never gets the chance to finish her sentence describing where she is talking about. Perhaps she would have said "India or one of the places that Girl Up fundraises for," or perhaps a broader category of countries in the Global South. Regardless of this lack of clarity, Sophie and Lauren interrupt, with Lauren asserting that in the kind of place that Daniela is talking about they would have to "cover up" in order to visit. For Lauren, girls in the Global South lack the "simple things," such as the choice of what they want to wear. She later went on to say, "the fact that they have no choice makes me so sad." Daniela's final comment also assumes not only that girls in the Global South have to cover themselves, but also that they would be disapproving of those girls that did not do so, to the point where the UK girls would also need to "cover up" in order to "connect with

them.” For this group, the category of “India or one of the places...” is enough to make assertions about girls’ rights and freedoms, attitudes and experiences.

The girls in both schools in Lilongwe made similar statements about girls in the “villages” or “rural areas” of Malawi. Olivia, the club president at the township school, explained the situation for girls in those areas:

The rural areas in the villages there are most people who believe in culture, in village they believe boys to be educated than girls, so when she a girl want to go to school, they tell her not go to school but she should wait instead for wait for the right time to be to get married [...] so maybe we can reduce the mindset of the [laughs] people in the village.

Lilongweans I met, from taxi drivers to school teachers, frequently told me about the situation in the “villages.” They described the rural areas of Malawi as backwards and dominated by outdated cultural or tribal norms. They were keen to distance themselves from such attitudes and to stress the need to alter those attitudes, or as Olivia puts it, “reduce the mindset.” Scholars argue that colonialism left a legacy of “crude dualistic understandings of social reality” in Malawi, in which rurality came to be associated with tradition and ‘modern’ concepts – such as gender – are associated with urbanism (Riley and Dodson, 2016: 1050). Ahadi, a Malawian girl studying at the international school, painted a similar picture of rural Malawi: “when I visit my grandma erm in cos she has a big farm in the village, and I like talk to the girls there but like most of them have their kids on their back and they’re my age.” Despite the fact that both Olivia and Ahadi are from Malawi themselves, they do not question the Girl Up depiction of the Southern girl and instead, they transfer it onto an ‘other’ girl in a more rural area of Malawi. While the girls’ own circumstances were strikingly different to the portrayal of the voiceless Southern girl, they did not question it in relation to other Malawian girls in the “village.”

Finally, it is evident from the girls’ conversations that this perception of difference also led to a perceived distance between the girls. In New York, Gabriella tried to explain why the club chose to hold awareness raising events about gender injustice in the Global South. She said, “We have to like

help the girls understand here like what every girl around the world is facing and then we can like connect to girls like *in other worlds*.” While this is perhaps a slip of the tongue and she had intended to say “in other countries,” it epitomises a perception amongst the Northern girls that the Global South, or as they frequently called it “the third world” or “underdeveloped countries,” was a world apart from them. Even those girls who wanted to express solidarity or similarity with the ‘other’ girl struggled to do so. For example, in the following extract from the UK, I asked the girls whether they thought that the ‘*Connecting the Dots*’ video was about the differences or the similarities between girls.

Rhiannon: I think it’s cos **we’re all similar people but they’re just victims of circumstance.**

Lauren: Mm

Rhiannon: [If it weren’t

Daniela: [Yeah in different situations, **kind of the same thing probably or just have different stories** [pause] we’re like put in different places.

Lauren: Yeah.

Daniela: And cultures.

[Pause]

Lauren: **Like she is me [pause] but is she just ended up over there [...]** we could have a million things in common she could, like she could be, **she could have the same like school grades as me but she hasn’t been allowed to go to school**, she could’ve been in my position.

Daniela: I think it affects the way they think as well cos

Lauren: Mm

Daniela: Yeah

Lauren: They convince [themselves then

Daniela: [They they

Lauren: Like oh I couldn’t

Daniela: Yeah

Lauren: [Yeah

Daniela: [They're just put down by you know like this

Lauren: Mm mm

Daniela: So, they kind of start believing that

Lauren: Yeah.

The girls begin by trying to talk about the similarities between themselves and girls in the Global South, but they struggle. In the sections highlighted in bold, Lauren and Daniela start by asserting a similarity but then immediately follow it by highlighting a difference between Northern and Southern girls. For example, "she is me but she just ended up over there," or "she could have the same school grades as me but she hasn't been allowed to go to school." Eventually, Daniela's statement "I think it affects the way they think as well" is all it takes to abandon the search for similarities, leading the girls to reach a consensus that their counterparts in the South internalise their oppression, becoming convinced of their own inferiority. In a short extract, the girls have gone from Rhiannon's assertion that "we're all similar people," to a clear consensus between Daniela and Lauren that girls in the Global South think differently to girls in the Global North. Once again, there is no need to specify where the girls are or what they are experiencing. For example, when Daniela says "they're just put down by you know like this....," she never finishes explaining what the girls are put down by because she is interrupted by Lauren, but still goes on to conclude that girls in the South "start believing that," whatever that is. Once again, the girls seemed to uncritically reproduce the portrayal of the Southern girl as a passive victim of circumstance and of geography.

In the focus groups, girls frequently described a "barrier" between themselves and the Southern or Northern 'other.' This was experienced as a physical barrier, with one girl in the UK complaining, "we're not allowed to actually go there." While she did not specify where "there" was, this came up in the context of a discussion of the Southern girl, suggesting a frustration that Girl Up

did not involve exchange visits. It was also experienced as a psychological barrier, as demonstrated when Sophie (a UK participant) told me, “it seems like impossible to me, you know, to sort of like put myself in their position.” Hailey, a participant in New Jersey, found it similarly difficult to relate to the Southern girl. When I started trying to describe the Malawian girls’ attempts to bring their classmates back to school, she interrupted me, saying “this is really like it’s their lives you know [...] that’s really crazy.” While I was trying to present a more nuanced depiction of Southern girlhood, emphasising the agency the Malawian girls show in taking action on issues they care about, Hailey interrupted this attempt. It ended up being absorbed into a discursive construction that sees those Malawian girls as completely ‘other,’ and Hailey’s conclusion that the situation was “crazy” suggests a difficulty in relating to those girls in any way.

In the international school in Lilongwe, the two girls questioned the Girlafesto’s attempts to unite girls around common themes:

Ahadi: When I think about me and maybe a girl in like the rural areas one of the townships, like music and hair and clothes like aren’t that connection for me [...] I change my [clothes is like

Shrimayi: [That wouldn’t be something, that wouldn’t be something that’s normal in a rural area, erm I am me I follow, I lead I learn, teach [Ahadi: Yeah that] I follow might link because they follow what they’ve been told, but I am me, lead learn teach, they might not have the opportunity to do that.

[Lines omitted]

Ahadi: Which is where the, the link they’re trying to make breaks down for me a little bit.

In this extract, Ahadi begins by questioning whether the most meaningful connection between girls in different settings would be around clothes and hair. This could be a criticism of the poster’s focus on superficial and aesthetic qualities and she seems to be suggesting that a genuine connection between girls around ideas might be possible. However, she is interrupted by Shrimayi, who

interprets Ahadi's criticism of the resource as centring around a perceived ability of girls "in a rural area" in Malawi to choose their clothes or listen to music. She concludes that the only part of the Girlafesto that might apply to the "rural" or Southern girl is "I follow [...] because they follow what they've been told." In the end, as Ahadi states, the connection "breaks down." Interestingly, I had previously described my contact so far with the school in the township of Lilongwe and the girls' activities there and when this came up again later in conversation, it was clear that Ahadi and Shrimayi had assumed I meant there was a school similar to theirs that was reaching out to girls in the townships. Ahadi asked, "what do they do like the township girls come in" or "do the girls the school go out?" When I explained that the township girls themselves were the Girl Up club members, they were both surprised. Once again, my attempts to provide a more nuanced depiction of the 'South' were adapted to fit the dominant depiction of passivity and helplessness. Despite their own ambiguous position within the North-South divide, these two girls had clear ideas about who they thought was in a position to help others and who needed help.

Despite challenging the Girl Up discourse in many ways with their actions and the views they expressed in the focus groups, the girls consistently reproduced the discursive North/South divide, assuming that girlhoods across that divide were completely opposite to one another and finding it difficult to relate to the 'other' girl. This was one depiction in the discourse that none of the groups seemed to challenge in the same way that they challenged depictions of themselves and their own lives. As the research progressed, I began to question whether this was because despite their participation in a supposedly global campaign, none of the girls had actually had contact with Girl Up clubs in other countries or contexts and were therefore not equipped with the necessary information to challenge these representations.

The Impossibility of Connecting through Girl Up

All of the girls I met were eager to connect to other Girl Up clubs around the world. Yet none of them had established such contact. Gabriella in New York shared the sentiments of several of the

other girls in the US, stating “it would be like so awesome for us to just connect with them like have like pen pals I guess or something like that.” Janet, in Lilongwe, told me in no uncertain terms, “I want friend from America.” Ahadi and Shrimayi at the international school told me that they understood Girl Up, which they had only just joined, to be a programme focused on “one on one conversations and sharing” and that this was a big motivation for them in starting a Girl Up club. As I discuss in Chapter 4, the ‘community’ section of the Girl Up website seemed to feature inaccurate information on clubs, sometimes showing clubs that did not exist and at other times not listing those that did. The directors of the school in the township of Lilongwe tried using it to contact other clubs, but they received error messages every time they tried to reply to a message from another club adviser. While some of the girls I spoke to used the website, they did so to post updates about their own activities rather than contact other clubs. By totalling the money they had raised, they gained ‘activity points’ for the club leader board, which is visible to all other clubs. In that sense, the website seemed to be more about pitting girls in a fundraising competition against, rather than connecting them to, one another.

This is perhaps why the girls seemed to perceive that making any connection between North and South was impossible. This is perhaps most evident in the following extract from the international school, after I had explained about the other Girl Up club in the township of Lilongwe. Ahadi and Shrimayi, who were so keen to make personal connections with other girls, are discussing with their teacher the possibility of linking up with a school in the same city as their own, no more than ten miles away:

Ahadi: Like how do you [pause] how do you make that connection cos like in Area [number]

Shrimayi: They’re there

Ahadi: They’re there, and they’re in like the townships, you can’t get them to come all the way there that’s like, all the way here, which is unreal, you’d have to get girls [here to go there.

Shrimayi: [Well we would have to go there.

[Lines omitted]

Teacher: But how do you get there?

Ahadi: See [laughs] that's

Shrimayi: That's the issue.

The gap between these two sections includes a long conversation about the practicalities of travelling to various locations and Ahadi's laughter in the penultimate line is in exasperation at a conversation that seems to be repeating itself. Despite being just a few miles away, to the girls the township the other school is located in seems so distant that any possible connection would be "unreal." While it seems completely impossible to these girls that the other school might come to them, the possibility of going to a township seems equally implausible, despite their access to a minibus and budget for community service activities.

Before participating in my research, none of the participating schools or girls saw any possibility of contacting their fellow Girl Up members in other countries or settings, even though they very much desired to do so. Girl Up was failing to "connect the dots." Further than this, however, this supposedly 'global' campaign appeared to actually be reinforcing the discursive divide between the Northern and Southern girls, in which they found it difficult to relate to one another and saw any chance of interaction as impossible, even when they were situated just a few miles apart in the same city. Yet over the course of the research project, this did begin to change. In the following section, I analyse some of the interactions that took place that gradually established links between the girls and eroded this discursive North-South divide.

“They Can Teach Us”: The Beginnings of Mutual Learning and Respect in North-South Encounters between Girl Up Members

Over the course of the fieldwork, I was able to set up links between some of the club where they had been unable to do so themselves through the Girl Up website. Although it was something that I was keen to do, it came about at the request of the girls themselves, who in every context wanted to hear about the other clubs I had worked with and what they were doing. In some cases, such as between the US and Malawi, time differences meant that I was only able to provide the girls with a bit more information about their peers, or perhaps an exchange of emails, as there was no time of day, for example, when the two clubs would both be in school to speak to one another via Skype. I did succeed in setting up a Skype conversation between the UK school and the school in the township of Lilongwe and, through an exchange of emails, the girls themselves eventually set up a long-term partnership between the two schools in Lilongwe. In this section, I explore how the girls’ perceptions of the ‘other’ girl changed through these interactions, concluding that the discourse of oppositional girlhoods was ultimately very fragile in the face of these very minor interventions.

In every school, the girls were keen to hear about the activities of other Girl Up clubs I had met. They were surprised and delighted to hear about the similarities in what they were doing. The girls in the township of Lilongwe were keen to know what a Girl Up club was like in the UK. I explained that the girls in the UK held fundraisers for girls’ education, just like them, although because education is free in the UK, they gave the money to girls in other countries. I also discussed the similarities between their activities. Recurring themes for girls in both the UK and Malawi were challenging the perception that girls are not as good at boys in maths and science, helping each other to deal with bullying from boys and helping to build girls’ self-confidence. At that stage, I had not yet met with the clubs in the US, otherwise I could have told them about girls’ collecting sanitary products to donate to women’s shelters, something the Lilongwe girls might have related to

considering our discussions about girls missing school because of menstruation. The girls in Lilongwe seemed excited and amazed to think that their peers in the UK might be dealing with some of the same issues as them:

RW: There are still ways in the UK where girls are treated differently to boys, or, maybe sometimes they need some encouragement or some subjects in particular like, in the UK not many girls like science or maths

Fatsani: Yes

RW: And so, and they think that they can't be good at it because they're a girl

Fatsani: Yes

RW: So, they're kind of trying to change that as well, so they're I think really their activities are quite similar to yours

Fatsani: Wow

[Laughter]

Chikondi: So, they are doing the same

RW: Yeah I think so, yeah they, they had like erm, they all bake er cakes, they make cakes and then bring them in to sell and then the money they donate

Chikondi: OK

RW: Yeah, things like that.

Chikondi: We are learning.

RW: So, they have this club to, where they can talk and where they can encourage each other, so I think it's very similar to what you do, yeah

Grace: OK that's funny.

[Laughter]

RW: Yeah, erm, but they also have some activities to try to help like empower each other

Olivia: Mm

Tadala: Mm

RW: Within their school because they still also face [erm

Olivia: [Different challenges

RW: Yeah like or sometimes discrimination or then maybe they're not treated the same as the boys or sometimes, more is expected of the boys than the girls or you know so they, they still face that as well so they, yeah they ho- they also have a group to try and talk about these issues and encourage each other so I think it's very similar [actually

Tadala: [Yeah OK

Olivia: [Mm

RW: To what you [laughs] guys do [pause] very similar.

Olivia: That's nice.

In these extracts, my own hesitation comes from an awareness that in answering the girls' questions about the UK, there was a risk that I might reproduce discourses that see the Global North as more advanced or having already achieved gender equality. Yet at the same time, in my eagerness to counter such discourses, there was also a risk of misrepresenting or ignoring the very real differences in the girls' contexts – starting from the fact that the girls in the UK had access to a free education while the girls in Malawi did not. I stumbled over my words and paused, yet in both the first and third extracts, the girls encourage me to continue. In the first extract, Chikondi asks “So they are doing the same?” as a way to check that she has understood my meaning and to push me to say more. In the third extract, when I am struggling to find the words to make a point, Olivia finishes my sentence for me, stating that the girls in the UK face “different challenges.” She and Tadala both interject with words of encouragement and understanding (“Yeah OK”; “Mm”) when I seem to be concluding. This shows not only an eagerness to hear more about Northern girls, but

their exclamations of “wow,” “that’s funny” and “that’s nice” seem to suggest surprise and delight at discovering that they might not be so different to them after all.

In some cases, while my explanations may have served to highlight differences between girls’ situations, they seemed to do so in unexpected ways for some of the girls. For example, when explaining to the girls in the US about the activities of the girls in Lilongwe, I focused on the ways that they were tackling the kind of issues that Girl Up resources talk about. While they may have been expecting to hear that these issues were a reality for the girls in Malawi, the Girl Up resources had not prepared them for the idea that these girls were actively working to change them. The US girls’ responses were a mixture of admiration and awe. When I explained to one group in New York that the Lilongwean girls were holding fundraisers to raise the \$20 per term necessary to keep their friends in school, Hailey exclaimed, “that’s awesome” and Madison agreed, “so awesome.” At another school in New York, when I told them the Lilongwean girls planned to confront parents who had stopped sending their daughters to school, Nicola immediately responded, “oh my god that’s brave” and Lucia said, “that’s amazing.” With their permission, and at the request of the girls, I put some of the contact teachers from US schools in touch with the directors of the school in the township of Lilongwe, so the girls can exchange letters or emails in future. However, these small examples show the power that even a small amount of information and context has in changing perceptions.

Where I was able to facilitate more meaningful contact between Girl Up clubs, the changes in perceptions were even more stark. The first time I met them, the Year 13 girls in the UK told me that they had to take action on the issue of girls’ education in the Global South, “because no one is doing it there.” Over the course of our next meetings and emails, I gave them information on what the girls in Malawi were doing and just before the end of my stay in Lilongwe, I managed to set up a Skype link between the two schools. Given this chance to speak to one other, a completely different attitude emerged, with the UK girls asking questions such as “how hard is it to like campaign to

change your area?" Later on, when discussing their club activities, the girls in Lilongwe (including Olivia and Mayamiko) explained their fundraising events to the girls in the UK (including Chloe):

Olivia: OK at [name of school] Girl Up club we have different activities, like drama, so [pause] we maybe () to have those dramas and those who want to watch us they pay hundred kwacha²⁴ to enter in the hall that's how we raise our money.

[Pause]

RW: So, like, a hundred kwacha is about ten p, er so they hold drama events and charge ten p admission and raise money that way.

[Pause]

Chloe: That's great [pause] erm [pause] erm yeah that is a good idea we might be trying that in future.

RW: Did you hear that that they say they're gonna copy, they want to do the same.

[Laughter]

Director: No problem.

Mayamiko: No problem you can start if you want to, yah.

[Laughter]

The UK girls' attitude that they were the only ones who could help to solve the problems of their counterparts in the Global South changed when they were given the opportunity to actually speak to a group of girls in Lilongwe and hear about what they were doing. There was a tone of admiration and respect with which they asked the opinions, and even advice, of girls they now seemed to see as their peers.

Perhaps the greatest change in perception came from the girls at the international school in Lilongwe, whose approach to interacting with their peers changed from a mission to teach them to a determination to learn from them. When I initially asked them what they thought the purpose of

²⁴ 100 Malawian Kwacha – approximately ten pence at the time of the fieldwork.

Girl Up was, Shrimayi answered “something about having group erm projects with the girls of, with the girls that you’re helping and then teach them how to tackle life in different contexts.” She felt that the best way for her to help girls who are facing issues such as poverty, child marriage and pregnancy was to teach them how to deal with those issues, despite having never experienced them herself. This confidence was shaken over the course of the focus group by two things. First, my explanations about the actions of the girls in the township of Lilongwe to “tackle life” for themselves and second, an interjection from their school counsellor, who was present during the first half of the focus group. During a conversation about child marriage, the counsellor interjected to state that it was also an issue that she had to deal with at the international school. To Ahadi and Shrimayi, this came as a complete shock:

Ahadi: No like you never think [that

Shrimayi: [Yeah

Ahadi: That in an IB²⁵ school

Shrimayi: Exactly jeez

Ahadi: Oh my gosh

[Lines omitted]

Shrimayi: That's just goose bumpy.

[Laughter]

The revelation that they knew less than they thought about their own school shook the girls’ confidence that they would be able to teach girls in other contexts. Later on, the township school came up in conversation again and this time Shrimayi suggested contacting the girls there because “they can teach us what they’re going through.” At this point, the conversation focused on how the girls in the township might be able to teach Ahadi and Shrimayi about the issues, so that they could then begin to take action on them in their own school. A month or so later, Shrimayi contacted me

²⁵ International Baccalaureate.

asking for the email addresses of the directors of that school and six months later, she got in touch about meeting up. Her email read, “We would appreciate if we could visit the Girl Up club members in your school to learn from what they have been doing.” Both schools reported to me that the meeting was a big success, with another one arranged soon afterwards and plans being made for a few girls to travel to the international school and help run a stall at an upcoming awareness raising event – a journey that Ahadi and Shrimayi had previously thought impossible. For their second meeting with the girls in the township, instead of preparing teaching materials as they might have thought necessary at the start of this process, they suggested to the director that they bring some team building activities for all of the girls to do together. This change in perceptions of the ‘other’ girl was made possible first and foremost by bringing the girls together with their teacher and with a researcher to discuss topics that they had not previously sat down to discuss together. The information and contexts that were revealed to them in that conversation challenged the dominant discourse about girlhood in the Global North and South that they had up until then embraced.

Conclusions

Once again, my analysis in this chapter shows a complex negotiation by the girls of the Girl Up discourse. The Northern girls did little to question the depiction of the Southern girl in campaigns such as Girl Up and all of the girls, regardless of location, reproduced patronising discourses that depict the ‘other’ girl as voiceless and in need of rescue. As the analysis shows, discourses of passivity and victimhood in Southern girlhood were reproduced, often with very little context or information to justify generalisations being made about girls and their lives. Living in a society with an abundance of patronising images of Africa and having had no contact with girls in any of the countries they are fundraising for, they had no information to draw on in order to critically analyse the depiction of the Southern girl.

It took very little intervention, however, to prompt the girls to challenge those discourses. In some cases, this was as little as a small amount of contextual information I was able to provide

during a focus group, in others it was a one-hour Skype conversation and in one case, a simple exchange of email addresses became a lasting partnership between two schools. In every case, Northern girls began to question their previous confidence in their understanding of the South and were surprised and delighted to hear examples of their Southern counterparts' bravery and assertiveness. They went from seeing themselves as the "sisters, saviours and 'BFFs'" of Southern girls (Koffman, Orgad and Gill, 2015: 161), to asking instead for their fundraising tips, for their insights and experiences in tackling issues such as child marriage and to suggesting that they work together as a team to learn from one another. My analysis in this chapter shows that even when there was one aspect of the Girl Up discourse that club members initially accepted – the divide between North and South – this acceptance was fragile.

The impact of these small interventions reveals just how much Girl Up itself is failing to "Connect the Dots." Its resources and promotional materials reproduce a North-South divide, while its members struggle to make the actual contact with other Girl Up clubs that often motivated them to join the "community" in the first place. It would take very little effort for a campaign such as Girl Up to facilitate the kind of North-South contact that I did during this research, for example, ensuring the community section of the website is running or providing girls with stories and examples of Southern girls' activism. However, to do so would not fit with the campaign's primary focus of fundraising for UN agency projects in the Global South. Indeed, it may even serve to undermine it, as demonstrated by the fact that after speaking to the club in Lilongwe, my research participants in the UK told me that they intended to send the money they had raised from cake sales straight to that school, rather than to the UN Foundation. If the community section of the website were to succeed in setting up meaningful relationships between girls in the North and South it might lead to yet more girls deciding to take the situation into their own hands. Cynthia Cockburn (2000: 61), reflecting on an experience of setting up transnational links between research participants in three different settings that had recently experienced conflict, reflects that both "skills and sensitivity to difference and inequality, the tools of transversal politics, are needed in encounters between

women of the rich North and those of the poor South.” This sensitivity to difference and inequality is lacking in the Girl Up discourse and indeed in the resources of many girl power organisations in development. The Girl Up community at the time of the fieldwork seemed to be less a “community” and more a fundraising competition, in which the girls felt that the possibility of connecting with their counterparts around the world was implausible, if not “unreal.”

My analysis in this chapter also suggests that in a poststructuralist, feminist and postcolonial analysis of powerful discourses that are produced and reproduced by international institutions, it would be all too easy to overestimate the dominance that they have. While it would be possible to write an entire chapter on this data arguing that members of Girl Up clubs uncritically reproduce a patronising discourse that sees girls in the Global North as the ‘saviours’ of their helpless sisters in the South, this would not tell the whole story. Initially, the girls did seem to reproduce this discourse and it shaped not only the way that they talked about the ‘other’ girl, but also their belief in the impossibility of connecting with her. Yet the data also reveals this seemingly dominant discourse, reproduced so clearly in Girl Up resources, to be extremely fragile in the face of alternative sources of contextual information and actual interactions. In many cases, the girls were simply exposed to a new perspective or introduced to a new acquaintance for a matter of minutes and yet the difference in their understanding is noticeable. This analysis demonstrates the ease with which a seemingly dominant discourse was disrupted and suggests a possibility for researchers to explore other situations where marginalised groups can disrupt powerful discourses in development.

Chapter 11 – Conclusions and Implications

In this thesis, I have analysed Girl Up in a way that had not been done before in the relevant literatures. I have demonstrated that seemingly dominant girl power discourses about individual girls' abilities to end world poverty can be, and frequently are, disrupted. In the following paragraphs, I summarise my research findings in response to my research questions. I also consider the role of my methodological choices and theoretical framework in offering fresh insights in relation to the discourses in question. I then discuss the contributions of the findings to the literatures on gender and development, girlhood studies and youth studies more broadly as well as the implications for campaigns such as Girl Up and their policies concerning girls in the Global North and South. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study, the scope for further research on this topic and the implications of the lessons I have learnt during the research for my own future work.

Summary of Findings

My first research question asked what the Girl Up discourse is. In Chapter 5, I analysed a range of Girl Up texts in order to identify a dominant discourse that resonates strongly with girl power discourses in international development. Firstly, it reproduces neoliberal, postfeminist discourses of opportunity and choice that position girls as individually responsible for themselves and for their wider societies. In Girl Up, girls in the Global South are positioned as worthy of investment not because of their rights, but rather because of what they can achieve for their communities in terms of eliminating poverty. In order to do so, they must successfully navigate the market, managing the financial investment in them and their education, making the right choices and avoiding sexual relationships with boys. Girls in the Global North, by contrast, can take on the responsibility for changing the world if they use their spectacular individual talents towards the Girl Up campaign. Secondly, therefore, Girl Up positions girls in the North and South in an oppositional relationship to one another. Northern girls are portrayed as always already empowered, with talents, opportunities and power while Southern girls are portrayed as illiterate, constrained by societal norms and

powerless. The Southern girl does have the potential to make change, but only as the result of an intervention by her Northern counterpart.

However, reading against the grain, I did identify instances within Girl Up materials that do not reproduce dominant discourses in development. A key criticism of the girl powering of development has been the tendency for campaigns to depoliticise both gender and global inequalities, encouraging Northern publics to see individual donations as the solution to problems caused, or exacerbated, by wider structural and political inequalities. However, Girl Up does occasionally encourage its members in the US to lobby their politicians about issues concerning girls' rights and it also has featured content on its website, inspired by its members' views, encouraging girls to read the books of, or follow on Twitter, left-leaning feminists whose work focuses on intersectional oppressions. I conclude that even within official Girl Up materials, feminist staff and members find some room to disrupt dominant discourses. Girl Up, I conclude, is not the consistent reproduction of girl power discourses that the literature on gender and development might suggest it would be. Rather, it is a complex negotiation between a powerful international institution (the UN Foundation) and its corporate sponsors and feminist Girl Up staff and members.

My second research question asked how Girl Up club members in the Global North and South negotiate the Girl Up discourse. In order to analyse this, I conducted focus groups with Girl Up club members in the UK, US and Malawi, both to gather information about their activities as part of Girl Up and to analyse their co-construction of meaning about girl power and international development in those conversations. In Chapter 6, I analysed how girls read Girl Up marketing materials. While my use of a video and poster from Girl Up were initially intended to act as prompts for conversation in the focus groups, it soon became clear that the focus groups introduced the girls to these resources, which I see as epitomising the Girl Up discourse and which they had never seen before. Therefore, the girls' readings of Girl Up materials must be interpreted in the context of being their immediate reaction to materials they were only just encountering, without much time to

study them or formulate opinions about them. Nevertheless, the girls' readings were not uncritical. While they took pleasure in some of the girl power messages in the Girl Up discourse, they also adapted them and even at times critiqued them, questioning portrayals of Northern girlhood and the formatting decisions taken to market these materials at girls. Despite belonging to the Girl Up campaign, the girls' reading of the Girl Up discourse was negotiated.

In Chapter 7, I argue that the girls' participation in Girl Up constitutes a form of feminist activism, in which they reject the primary purpose of Girl Up as a fundraising campaign and instead adapt it to fit their own visions of girls' empowerment. These include creating safe spaces to support and mentor each other, organising and attending political events with feminist aims, challenging sexism and hostility within their own schools and generally rejecting the Northern saviour/Southern victim model of girls' empowerment of the Girl Up discourse. I also argue that they rejected neoliberal, postfeminist discourses in favour of embracing the feminist movement and a collective fight for equality. In answer to my sub-question about how girls as feminist activists negotiate participation in a campaign that produces and reproduces neoliberal, postfeminist discourses about girls, I argue that they adapt the campaign or even use it strategically to meet their own feminist aims.

Chapters 8 and 9 continued to build this argument by demonstrating how girls in the Global North and South adapted the Girl Up discourse in their negotiation of its individualistic vision of girls' empowerment. While girls in Lilongwe did reproduce instrumentalist discourses that position Southern girls as responsible for their families and wider communities, they did so with the aim of taking power out of the hands of men and creating a more equal society. While they embraced narratives that see girls as capable of changing their societies, they emphasised the importance of girls supporting one another to do so together. Similarly, in the UK and US, Girl Up club members took pleasure in the Girl Up discourse's celebration of girls' potential to save the world and some girls stressed their own talents and potential. However, many of them also emphasised that they

were “only kids” and there was a limit to what they could achieve. They identified many barriers to their activism, including school hierarchies, and were keen to praise the adults they felt had helped them to overcome some of those barriers. It became clear to me throughout the research that teacher allies, in the role of Girl Up “advisors,” were a source of great inspiration and support for the girls. Neither the Northern or Southern girls, then, felt they had to change the world all on their own.

Finally, in response to my sub-question about how girls negotiate discourses of “oppositional girlhoods,” Chapter 10 argues that this was one discourse that the girls did initially reproduce uncritically. Girls in the Global North challenged portrayals of the North as a place of privilege and gender equality, but they did not challenge portrayals of the South as a place of disadvantage and patriarchal norms. They reproduced patronising discourses that portray the Global South as lagging behind the North. However, with small interventions as part of the research, I was able to give the girls more contextual information about their Southern counterparts and even to set up brief encounters between them, some of which resulted in lasting partnerships. Those interactions took place in an atmosphere of mutual learning and respect. They show that even those discourses girls reproduce uncritically can be easily disrupted with a small amount of information or with the opportunity to interact with their supposed ‘other.’ This highlights just how much Girl Up could promote meaningful connections and solidarity between girls around the world through the “community” section of its website and through fostering meaningful exchange between Northern and Southern girls.

Overall, these findings paint a picture of a complex negotiation of powerful discourses, where girls never adopt an entirely oppositional stance to the campaign, but nor do they embrace it uncritically. The complexity of the insights offered into the girls’ negotiation of Girl Up is a result of choices that I have made throughout the study. Firstly, while it would have been easy to write another study critiquing girl power discourses in development campaigns by analysing their

materials alone, my starting point of asking how girls negotiate them has enabled me to explore girls' agency in relation to these discourses, an under examined topic in the literature on gender and development. Secondly, the methodological choice of reading against the grain enabled me to analyse that agency on two different levels, exploring the commonalities between differently located groups of Girl Up club members and their adaptations of the Girl Up discourse, as well as the detail of interactions within a group that show ruptures or seepages in the dominant discourse. The latter was enabled by a third important choice to analyse interactions – and to use transcription symbols that facilitate this – between members of the focus groups, rather than analysing only the content of what was said. This revealed insights into the level of consensus within groups and highlighted minor details – sometimes a single word, laugh or interruption – that suggested a particular understanding was not accepted by all members of the group. A fourth and final decision to analyse the girls' interactions between clubs and locations, having established links between them, allowed me to go beyond simply discussing the girls' initial reproduction of oppositional discourses and to explore the complexity of those interactions. Together, these choices have yielded novel insights into how girls at times embrace, at times reject and at times strategically use the Girl Up discourse to further their own feminist aims.

It would be possible for another researcher to analyse my research data and write a thesis about all of the ways the girls reproduce girl power discourses. They may analyse different excerpts from the focus groups to the ones I have chosen, or they may even interpret the same excerpts as showing the dominance of those discourses, focusing on how girls reproduced patronising and 'othering' discourses about other girls or how they did not question the ability of a UN Foundation campaign to empower girls to solve world poverty. While these are important analyses to make and I have taken care to also discuss girls' dominant readings of Girl Up in this thesis, to focus only on this is to miss the subtle ways in which girls challenge representations of their capabilities and their needs. These findings suggest a rich and fascinating field of enquiry exploring girls' agency in relation to powerful discourses about girls.

Contribution and Implications of the Study

Building on the excellent work of a number of scholars in girlhood studies, I highlight girls' activism and the agency they demonstrate in relation to powerful discourses. It contributes to the emerging literature on girls' activism, showing how even within a campaign that has been critiqued for reproducing depoliticised and postfeminist discourses about global inequalities, girls find a way of carving out their own forms of feminism that challenge dominant understandings. More broadly, it also therefore contributes to the literature in the fields of youth studies and of politics, which have both historically overlooked girls' resistance to dominant discourses. In particular, I make a positive contribution to the literature on gender and development, which has largely focused to date on critiquing girl power discourses in development and has not explored girls' negotiation of them.

This thesis makes both an empirical and theoretical contribution to the various literatures discussed above. Empirically, it contributes an in-depth analysis of the Girl Up discourse, situating it within wider girl power discourses in development. It is also the first study to my knowledge with girls participating in the Girl Up campaign and one of only a very small number of empirical studies with girl and staff members of the many campaigns like it. Of those empirical studies discussed in the literature review (e.g. Hayhurst, 2013; Hayhurst, 2014; Moeller, 2014; Moeller, 2013), all have focused on how the organisations funded by girl power campaigns (in all of these cases, The Girl Effect) have been shaped by the campaigns' priorities. None of them have explored the seepages where staff or girls themselves have found ways to resist such power relations. In this, therefore, my research contributes new analysis and shows the potential for an exciting new field of enquiry which focuses on the many ways that development discourses can be challenged by those in marginalised positions.

Theoretically, this thesis challenges the tendency in the literature on the girl powering of development to focus only on analysing dominant discourses and, as a consequence of this, to make assumptions about how these discourses will shape the behaviour of those marginalised in global

power structures. It suggests that feminist scholars wishing to critique discourses that portray girls as passive victims awaiting rescue need to also reflect on how the body of research their work contributes to might be guilty of portraying girls as the passive victims of powerful discourses. Without questioning the value of the excellent work done by the scholars cited in this thesis in critiquing those discourses, my argument here is that the overall literature in gender and development on the girl powering of development has paid too little attention to girls as agents, capable of making their voices heard and of challenging mainstream development thinking. This was the focus of a recent issue of *Gender and Development*, to which I contributed a paper based on the findings of this thesis (Walters, 2018), which explored how “young feminists are challenging international development policymakers and practitioners, national governments and development donors of all kinds to recognise their right to shape development itself” (Davies and Sweetman, 2018: 398). In highlighting girls’ agency and moments of resistance, scholars can act as allies to young feminist activists in challenging dominant discourses in development. More broadly, feminist scholars can also challenge the marginalisation of girls’ voices and the depiction of them as passive recipients of policies, media narratives and patriarchal norms. In doing so, to repeat a citation earlier in this thesis, they can “contribute to increasing the number of ways girls can ‘be’” (Jones, 1993: 162-4). In analysing girls’ negotiation of the Girl Up discourse, this study has contributed in one specific area of enquiry to this project and forms part of a larger effort by feminist scholars to act as allies to girls (Kearney, 2009: 22).

Taft writes that “One reason that girls sometimes practice their politics outside of the formal structures for civic and political engagement is that they do not believe that they will be able to make the kinds of changes they want from within these spaces” (2014: 263-4). While the girls in this study were conducting every one of the informal activities Taft lists as constituting political participation, their membership of Girl Up also places them within a “formal structure” for civic and political engagement. It is one of few formal structures of this kind that gives girls such a prominent role and allows them to take on leadership positions. Even where their decision to affiliate with Girl

Up was strategic, to girls it was a rare and valued opportunity to be part of an international campaign. Their sense that adults rarely take girls and their politics seriously, or afford them such opportunities, came through clearly in the data. There is a danger that feminist scholars' critiques of Girl Up might seem to fit this pattern of adults not taking the girls seriously. Indeed, in several groups the girls asked me what my research was about and I gave them a brief overview of the critique of the campaign. Some of the girls looked crestfallen. One of the girls in New Jersey – Hailey – asked me if I meant it was criticised because “it’s a bit white saviour complex?” When I said yes, she replied, “I get that, but I don’t think that’s how it actually plays out in clubs.” I assured the girls that how it actually “plays out” in clubs was the focus of my research and that was precisely what I was interested in finding out. However, I was left with a lasting impression that while the girls understood the critique of Girl Up, it still seemed to feel like an attack to them. An important reflection for my own future work will be in trying to find a balance between contributing to the excellent work that is being done in critiquing problematic discourses about girls, without underestimating girls’ capacity for critical thinking, attacking discourses that they take pleasure from and therefore risking falling into the category of “adults who don’t take us seriously.”

This leads onto the implications of the research for international development campaigns. The critique of such campaigns has been that they favour a particular, neoliberal vision of girls’ empowerment that reflects the interests and concerns of powerful international institutions and their corporate sponsors. Even when such campaigns claim to be listening to girls’ voices in shaping their policies, critics have argued that they select the opinions of girls that support, and then use them to justify, their pre-existing priorities (Khoja-Moolji, 2016). The findings of this research, however, imply that unless development campaigns genuinely listen to girls and respect their opinions on what empowerment means to them, there may be some discrepancy between the official aims of their campaigns and how girls actually participate in them.

There are four clear implications for Girl Up and other girl power campaigns emerging from this research. The first is that girls in the Global North are eager to take part in activities beyond fundraising and to engage in the political and structural causes of poverty and of gender inequality. They are particularly keen to take action on gender inequalities in their own communities and want to embrace an intersectional approach to doing so. They are critical of portrayals of the Global North as having already achieved gender equality. They adopt a more rights-based approach to empowerment and they see it as a collective struggle rather than an individual endeavour. Secondly, girls in the Global South also want to be part of campaigns to further girls' rights and to make change within their communities. They also want to be able to set up clubs and take part in international campaigns of this kind. They too adopt a rights-based approach to empowerment and see it as a collective struggle. Thirdly, girls in the North and South encountered many barriers to their activism that they need adult support to overcome. While they took pleasure in girl power discourses about girls' success and talents, they also felt disappointed or even disempowered when school and societal hierarchies made it almost impossible for them to achieve the goals that they had set out to achieve as part of the campaign. Girls cannot make this change without the support of adults and their wider communities. Fourthly, girls are eager to interact with one another across North/South divides and many of them join Girl Up believing the campaign will facilitate this. Such interactions are easy to facilitate in the digital age and could be possible through Girl Up's "community" section of its website. By actively involving girls in the Global South in the campaign and providing meaningful ways for them to interact with girls in the Global North and Girl Up staff members, the resources and policies of the campaign could come to align more closely with girls' own priorities and avoid assumptions about what differently located girls are capable of and interested in.

Limitations and Further Research

This study was inevitably constrained by the time and funding limits of the PhD process. This was particularly true in terms of the scope and locations of the fieldwork. Given my conceptualisation of

the international school as situated in the Global North, only one of the six schools in this study was located in the South. While this reflects the Northern location of the vast majority of Girl Up clubs and the Girl Up discourse's appeals to Northern girls as saviour figures, it would have been interesting to work with a larger number of schools located in the South, given that by their very existence they disrupt the Girl Up discourse. In the UK, very few clubs were listed on the website at the time of the research and only one school replied to my emails. More have since appeared and, with more time, further work with UK schools would have helped to gather richer data on their participation in the campaign. In the US, where I contacted 24 schools, two of the three participating schools were fee-paying while the third was selective but publicly funded. They were also concentrated in New York City and a small town of New Jersey less than ten miles away from New York City. Further research could therefore explore girls' experiences in a range of different US settings and contexts. All of the fieldwork locations also had English as an official language and as the language of education, again perhaps reflecting the fact that until very recently, Girl Up did not translate any of their website into other languages. However, some clubs did already exist at the time of the fieldwork in, for example, Spanish speaking countries and I did try to contact some to no avail. It would be fascinating to explore whether girls' experiences and adaptations of Girl Up differ across linguistic as well as cultural contexts. Finally, it would also have been preferable to spend longer with some of the groups of girls – particularly the two fee-paying schools in the US and the international school, where I was only able to meet with the girls once for the focus group. Greater time with these groups might have yielded even more interesting insights beyond those discussed in this thesis.

While I always set out in this research to ask how girls negotiate the Girl Up discourse, my conceptualisation of them as feminist activists came as an unexpected development as the research progressed. During the course of writing up this thesis, a new girl activist has come to the attention of international institutions and the media for spearheading a movement and mobilising her peers, highlighting the need for more research on girls' activism in future. Greta Thunberg's solo climate

strike outside the Swedish parliament for action to combat climate change has sparked a movement in which it is estimated that one and a half million school students are now involved in over 100 countries (Fleming, 2019). While many young people have joined this movement, the coverage of Thunberg in the media resonates strongly with spectacular discourses about how one girl will save the world. Thunberg herself seems surprised at this focus, frequently describing herself in a very unspectacular way, openly discussing her battles with depression and crediting her Asperger's Syndrome with her activism: "since I was different, I see the world from a different perspective, I see things very black and white" (Hook, 2019). She describes herself as having always been the "invisible girl" (ibid). While spectacular discourses make individual activists like Thunberg very visible, what remains invisible is the way that millions of girls around the world are making changes and challenging powerful discourses in their everyday interactions.

A report published in *Nature Climate Change* in May 2019 suggests that girls are more effective at changing conservative attitudes in the older generations than their male peers (Lawson et al., 2019). The researchers conducted a two-year intergenerational education project in schools in North Carolina, in which students were taught about climate change and encouraged to share their learning with their parents, grandparents or carers. Baseline surveys showed that parents being interviewed by their daughters were *less* likely than parents of boys to express concern about climate change, which the authors suggest may be due to stereotypes about girls being less knowledgeable about science (ibid: 4). However, after the girls had participated in the project, their parents reported *greater* levels of concern about climate change, suggesting that girls were more effective than their male peers at communicating a scientific and political message to their elders. The effect was most marked in male, conservative parents and carers, a group that have historically been the most resistant to education strategies about climate change (ibid: 3). The authors identify a future research need in examining how girls are more effective at communicating these messages to their parents, even when they are taken less seriously on the subject to begin with. They conclude that:

empowering girls to communicate about climate change with their parents may serve the dual purpose of working against typical gender roles that exclude girls from science and being particularly effective at building climate change concern among parents. (ibid: 4)

Given that an important emphasis of the climate strike youth movement – led by Thunberg and others – is about getting young people to persuade their older family members to vote for political parties that are taking the climate crisis seriously, the impact of girls talking to their parents could begin to change the political landscape and influence elections.

Girls, then, are changing the world, but in a very different way than media portrayals of spectacular girl activists like Malala Yousafzai and Greta Thunberg might suggest. It is not through giving speeches at the United Nations and Davos, or meeting with world leaders. It is through the small acts of agency and resistance they find space for within powerful discourses that would otherwise marginalise them from formal politics. There is, therefore, a continuing need for research into these everyday acts of resistance, which subvert or even strategically use girl power discourses to challenge the status quo. Using the theoretical and methodological approach I have used in this thesis, I believe an interesting area for future research might examine how girls experience participating in these youth-led campaigns. Do they experience the same barriers to activism as those discussed in this thesis? Do they see adults as their allies or as part of the cause of the problems? Do they identify with existing social movements or do they see themselves as creating new ones? Are they aware of discourses that see girls as less politically and scientifically knowledgeable? How do they negotiate these discourses and still succeed in persuading others of the need to act? By looking beyond the individual girls whose stories have been spectacularised and by working with groups of girls in a range of contexts, we can begin to understand how girls everywhere challenge patriarchal discourses and take action on political issues that are important to them. In doing so, we can also continue striving to understand how adults, researchers and organisations alike can best support girls to bring about the change they want to see in the world.

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Girl Up Fundraising Team (2017u) "Fund a Bike. Fund her future," fundraising email received 21 November.

Girl Up Fundraising Team (2017v) "Fund a Bike. Fund her future," fundraising email received 22 November

Appendix 1: Ethics Approval Letter



Name: Rosie Walters

Student No: 0401850

Susie Potts
SPAIS
11 Priory Road
Bristol BS8 1TU
Tel: +44 (0)117 331 7556
www.bristol.ac.uk/spais
susie.potts@bristol.ac.uk

July 2016

Dear Rosie

Re: Research Ethics Approval

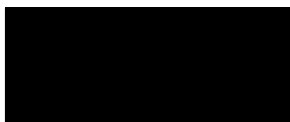
This is to confirm in writing, as previously advised, that the School Research Ethics Committee has reviewed your submitted documents, and is pleased to give full ethical approval for your project.

You are advised to take particular notice of the regulations concerning data storage and data encryption. The Information Commissioner has made it clear that *personal* data subject to the Data Protection Act must be encrypted whenever it is "transported" or "conveyed". This includes data stored on physical media (laptops, CD/DVDs, USB drives, etc.) as well as data transmitted electronically (email, FLUFF, etc.). Failure to do so is a breach of the 7th data protection principle and could result in action being taken against the University in the event of data loss.

- Definitions of personal data and sensitive data can be found here:
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/secretary/dataprotection/glossary.html> .
- Information about data storage can be found here:
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/research/>.
- Information about data encryption can be found here:
<http://www.bris.ac.uk/infosec/uobdata/encrypt/>.

You are encouraged to maintain contact with your supervisors and Dr Paula Surridge, Chair of the Research Ethics Committee, informing them of any changes that may occur to your plans or to your research. Should you have any queries or concerns, the Ethics Committee will be pleased to help and support you in any way possible.

Yours sincerely



Susie Potts
On behalf of SPAIS Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 2: Clubs Contacted

Table 2: List of Girl Up clubs contacted and their responses

Description	Location	Country	Reply to email?	Participate in research?	Details
International school	Cesar	Colombia	No	No	
University	Kingston	Jamaica	Yes	No	Respondent tried but failed to set up club.
International school	Lilongwe	Malawi	Yes	Yes	Initially told there was no club. After chance meeting with headteacher, contact made with school counsellor, who had spoken to two girls about setting up a club. They took part in a focus group.
Fee-paying independent school	Lilongwe	Malawi	Yes	Yes	18 focus groups, skype connection with another school. Total of 55 girls participating.
International school	Amsterdam	Netherlands	No	No	
State girls' school	Durban	South Africa	No	No	
Fee-paying independent school	La Lucia	South Africa	Yes	No	School stated they were not involved with Girl Up.

University	Tshwane	South Africa	No	No	
British school	Gran Canaria	Spain	No	No	
Four different girl guide groups	Various	Sri Lanka	No	No	Two emails to different contacts at the Sri Lanka Girl Guides Association both failed to deliver.
Selective, state-funded school	Cumbria	UK	Yes	No	School stated they did not have a Girl Up club.
University	Kent	UK	No	No	
Youth work charity	Leicester	UK	Yes	Yes	Spoke to staff member who was considering setting up a club.
American school	London	UK	Yes	No	School replied that one girl had expressed an interest in setting up a club but had not followed up.
Faith-based, state-funded boys' school with co-educational sixth form	London	UK	No	No	
State-funded school	North Wales	UK	Yes	Yes	Six focus groups.
State-funded school	Southampton	UK	No	No	
State-funded school	Uxbridge	UK	No	No	

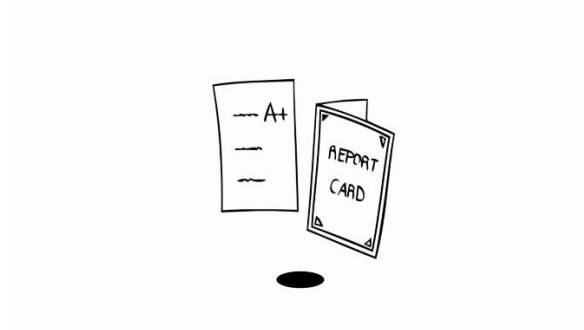
Selective, public high school	New Jersey	US	Yes	Yes	Two focus groups.
Public high school	New Jersey	US	No	No	
Public high school	New Jersey	US	Yes	No	Club cancelled at the end of the previous academic year due to lack of interest.
Faith-based, fee-paying girls' independent school	New Jersey	US	No	No	
Public high school	New York	US	Yes	No	The school agreed to participate but then cancelled shortly after I received an email from Girl Up asking me to stop contacting schools.
Public high school	New York	US	No	No	
Selective, public middle school	New York	US	No	No	
Selective, public high school and college	New York	US	No	No	
Public high school	New York	US	Yes	No	No staff aware of club.
Faith-based, fee-paying girls' independent school	New York	US	Yes	Yes	One focus group.
Fee-paying independent school	New York	US	Yes	No	Club no longer active.
Public high school	New York	US	Yes	No	Club put on hold.
Faith-based, fee-paying independent school	New York	US	No	No	

Public high school	New York	US	No	No	
Public high school	New York	US	No	No	
Selective, public high school	New York	US	Yes	No	Cancelled last minute – teacher failed to distribute permission slips in advance.
Fee-paying independent school	New York	US	Yes	Yes	Two focus groups.
Fee-paying, girls' independent school	New York	US	No	No	
Fee-paying college	New York	US	No	No	
Fee-paying, girls' independent school	New York	US	Yes	No	Club did not have time to participate in the research.
Selective, public high school	New York	US	Yes	No	Club no longer active due to Teen Leader dropping out.
University	Rhode Island	US	No	No	
Public High School	Washington DC	US	No	No	
Faith-based, fee-paying independent school	Washington DC	US	No	No	
Total Contacted:	42	Total Did Not Reply:	23	Number of Clubs Not/No Longer Active:	9

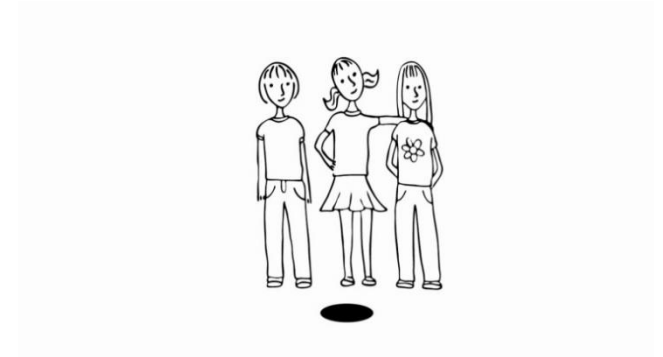
Appendix 3: Storyboard of *Connecting the Dots* Video



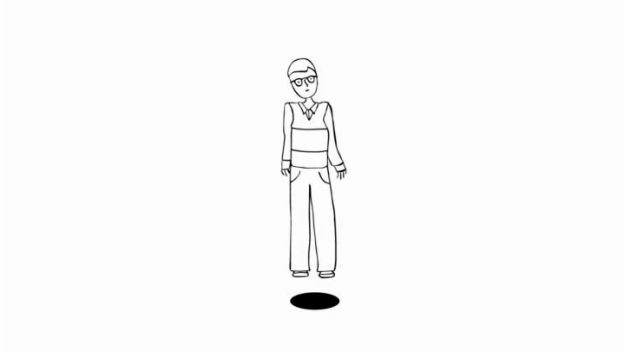
Imagine this: you're twelve again. From school to soccer practice, there's a lot to navigate, including the rest of your life.



You get decent grades,



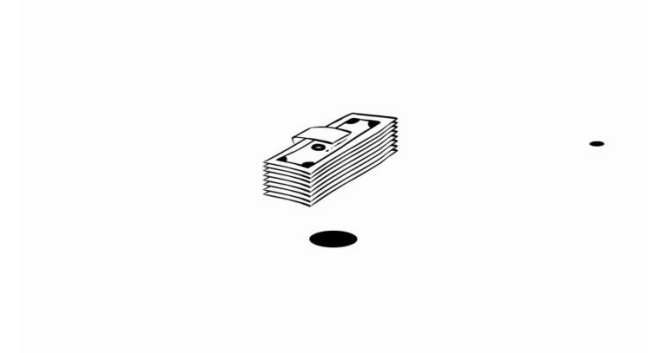
Find a few friends,



Make good decisions about boys. Well, mostly (Boy: 'Hey').



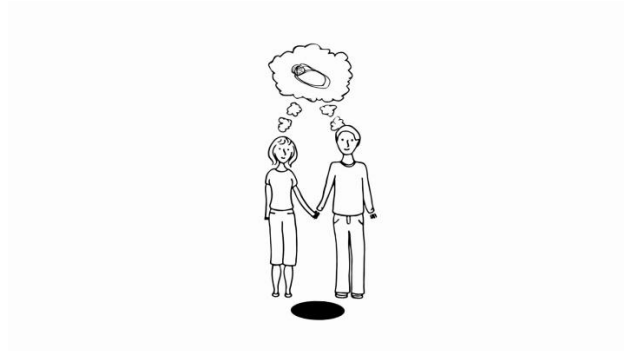
You go to college,



Get a job,



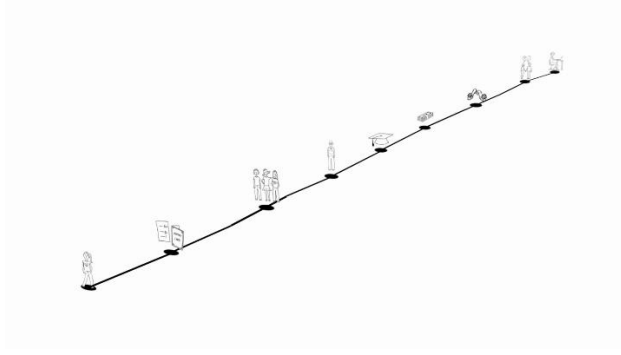
Buy some shoes,



You fall in love and plan for the future.



Maybe you're still figuring it out. But you're on your way.



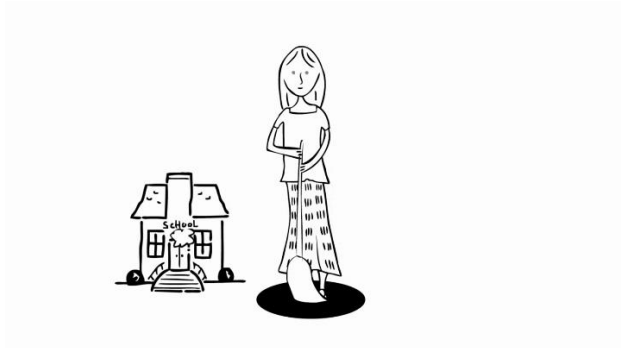
OK let's rewind.



You're twelve again. But this time,



You're one of the eighty-five per cent of all the world's adolescents with a lot of fewer options.



School is out of the question. You have to work.



You're forced to marry at thirteen.



Your husband isn't faithful, so you get HIV by eighteen,



And without a whole lot of say in the matter, you have four kids by age twenty (sound of baby crying).



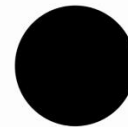
And after that well, things just get worse.



Now multiply that by the six hundred million adolescent girls in developing countries and you start to see



That our world



Is at a turning point.

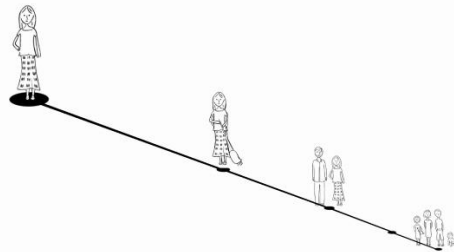


But what if you could improve the odds for these girls?

www.GirlUp.org



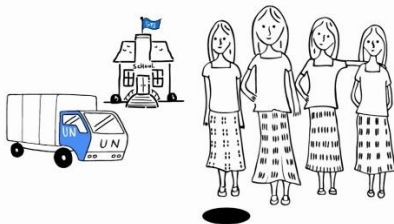
When you connect the dots you start to improve the options for girls around the world.



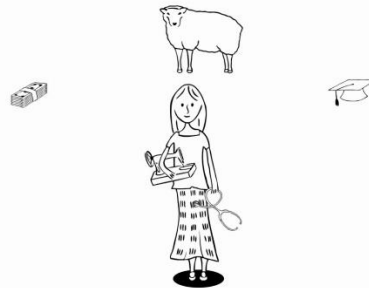
Let's rewind again.



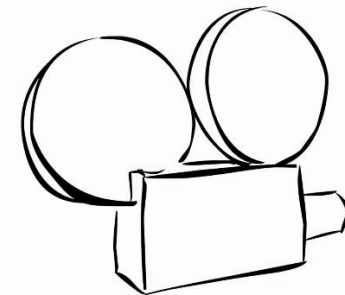
Aged twelve,



But this time, you help provide a safe space to live, learn and play. Really a place to be a girl.



Add better healthcare and a small loan to start a business and what do you have?



The power to help her build a better future



For herself,



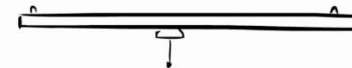
Her family,



Her community,



And her world.



www.GirlUp.org

UNITED NATIONS
FOUNDATION

You can make this change happen right this second,
so what are you waiting for?

Appendix 4: Initial Contact Email to Schools

Dear [name of teacher],

Thank you again for speaking to me earlier. As promised, I've included more information about the research project below.

As discussed, I am hoping to set up focus groups with girls who are participating in 'Girl Up' clubs as part of the United Nations Foundation's campaign to promote girls' education around the world. This is part of my research at the University of Bristol on girl power discourses in international development, which is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. I am really keen to speak to the members of the Girl Up club about why they joined and to hear their views on gender, and on the opportunities available to girls both in the UK and elsewhere.

I have several years' experience in youth work and education and I have drawn on this to design focus groups that are fun, informal and interactive, with plenty of activities to prompt discussion. I did a pilot study of this method in schools in Bristol last year and feedback from students and staff was really positive. I am also keen to make sure that it is an educational experience and so would be more than happy to offer follow-up workshops (or an assembly for a whole year group) on the research findings and process, or any topic relevant to my research (gender and politics, international development) that might be of interest, as a thank you to the girls and to the school. For example, last year I did a project in schools in Bristol on girls' perceptions of celebrity feminism, and then returned to do a follow-up workshop on my findings for the participants and a talk for the whole of sixth form on gender equality, as requested by the girls themselves.

As well as qualifications in youth work and teaching, I have a full DBS check through the university. I would be more than happy to provide evidence of these. The focus groups will not involve any questions of a sensitive or personal nature, but will focus entirely on the girls' participation in Girl Up, why they got involved and what they hope to achieve through it.

As discussed on the phone, it would be fantastic to work with the girls two or three times, to speak to them as they progress through different Girl Up activities (perhaps at the beginning, middle and end of Autumn term). I'm more than happy to be flexible around the school's schedule - the only difficulty I can foresee is that I will be teaching at the university and unfortunately don't know my timetable yet, however as the university term is much shorter than the school one and includes reading weeks, I'm hoping it will be easy to work around this.

Please let me know if I can provide any more information.

Best wishes,

Rosie

--

Rosie Walters

ESRC PhD Candidate

University of Bristol, School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies

Appendix 5: Information and Consent Sheet

Rosie Walters
School of Sociology, Politics and International Studies
University of Bristol
4 Priory Road
Bristol
BS8 1TY
United Kingdom
rosie.walters@bristol.ac.uk
[Redacted]



10 January 2017

Girl Up Research Project

Project Information Sheet

Dear research participant and parent/guardian,

Thank you so much for your interest in participating in the Girl Up research project. I am a postgraduate researcher at the University of Bristol and I am currently conducting this project, which examines perceptions of what it means to be a girl in different countries and what young women are doing to try to change those perceptions. I am fascinated by society's perceptions of girlhood in general, and how international development organisations have recently focused on trying to change those perceptions. A long-term research interest of mine has also been how, if at all, ways that girls are spoken about or portrayed might differ from the ways in which they see themselves. These are all themes I hope to explore with this research.

The project will involve a series of focus groups and interviews in schools and youth groups in the UK, US and Malawi. Each one will last for approximately an hour. It will include questions and activities to encourage participants to talk about their opinions about perceptions of girls, their motivations for joining a Girl Up club and the activities they are organising as part of that. The focus groups will be recorded, so that I can analyse the conversations and include quotations to illustrate my argument when I come to write up the research, which will form a chapter of my PhD thesis. I also hope to submit articles based on the research to relevant academic journals. Any quotations used in reports or research material will be anonymous, with no references to participants' names or to the school. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time, even if the focus group has already taken place, however please be aware that after June 2017 I will begin writing up the research and it may not always be possible to remove extracts from materials that have already been published.

Before moving into research, I spent several years working in education and youth work, and I am really keen that the focus groups will be a fun, interactive and worthwhile opportunity for all of the young women who take part.

If you consent to participate in the project, I would be very grateful if you could complete the attached form and give it to [name of contact teacher]. **Without the form, you will not be able to participate in the focus group.** If you have any further questions about the project, please do not hesitate to contact me on the email address or phone number above.

Yours faithfully,

[Redacted signature]

Rosie Walters

Consent Form for Girl Up Research Project

Focus Groups at [name of school].



For the participant to complete

- I confirm that I am 14 years of age or above ☐
- I have read and understood the project information sheet dated [date]. ☐
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐
- I agree to take part in the project. Taking part in the project will include participating in a focus group and being recorded (audio only). ☐
- I understand that my taking part is voluntary; I can withdraw from the study at any time and I will not be asked any questions about why I no longer want to take part. ☐
- I understand that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages and other research outputs but my name will not be used. ☐
- I understand that the University of Bristol will use the data I provide for no purpose other than research. ☐

For the parent/guardian to complete

- I have read and understood the project information sheet dated [date]. ☐
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project. ☐
- I give consent for _____ [name of participant] to take part in the research project. ☐

_____ Name of Participant	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Name of Parent/Guardian	_____ Signature	_____ Date
_____ Name of Researcher	_____ Signature	_____ Date

Appendix 6: Outline of Focus Group 1

Location and participants: Groups of girls who are members of a school Girl Up club in three different countries (United Kingdom, United States and Malawi).		
Research Questions: > What do the girls know about Girl Up? > Why did they want to get involved with Girl Up? > What do they hope to achieve as part of the club? > What is their understanding of girls' empowerment, and how do they see their Girl Up participation as contributing to it?		
Approximate Timing	Activity	Materials
5 minutes	<u>Introduction</u> Introduce myself, the focus group and project; ask if the girls would like to establish any ground rules; go over consent information that was sent out in advance, and ensure everybody wants to take part and knows that they can withdraw at any time. We will also discuss how there are no right or wrong answers, and that I am really interested to hear their opinions.	Consent information
15 minutes	<u>Connecting the Dots</u> Show the group the video from the Girl Up website, ' <i>Connecting the Dots</i> '. Give participants a few minutes to gather thoughts (or jot down answers on post-it notes) in response to the following questions: > What do they know about Girl Up? > What is Girl Up trying to do? > Why did they join? > What do they think of the video? Had they seen it before? Group discussion on these questions.	Girl Up video: ' <i>Connecting the Dots</i> '
20 minutes	<u>What's a Girlafesto?</u> Distribute copies of the Girl Up 'Girlafesto' and ask the girls to read through it. Then prompt discussion on the following themes: > Do the girls like it? > Does it represent how they feel about being a girl?	Copies of the Girl Up 'Girlafesto' Dictionary definition of a manifesto

	<p>If the participants have not discussed it already, raise the fact that 'girlafesto' is a play on the word 'manifesto.' Distribute copies of the dictionary definition of a manifesto and prompt discussion on the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Does that definition resonate with Girl Up? > The definition states that a manifesto is a 'public declaration of intent, policy, aims, as issued by a political party, government or movement.' Do the girls see themselves as part of a political movement? Why/why not? 	
15 minutes	<p><u>Our Own Girlafesto</u></p> <p>Ask the girls to come up with their own Girlafesto for their school. Prompt questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > What do they hope to achieve with Girl Up? > What have they got planned/have they achieved so far? > What impact would they like their efforts to have more widely, and within the school itself? 	<p>Large sheet of paper</p> <p>Pens</p>
5 minutes	<p><u>Any questions for me?</u></p> <p>These can be on anything from more details about the project or the research process, to answering any questions they might have about my views or why I'm interested in this topic.</p>	

Appendix 7: Photographs of Visual Activities Used during Focus Group 2

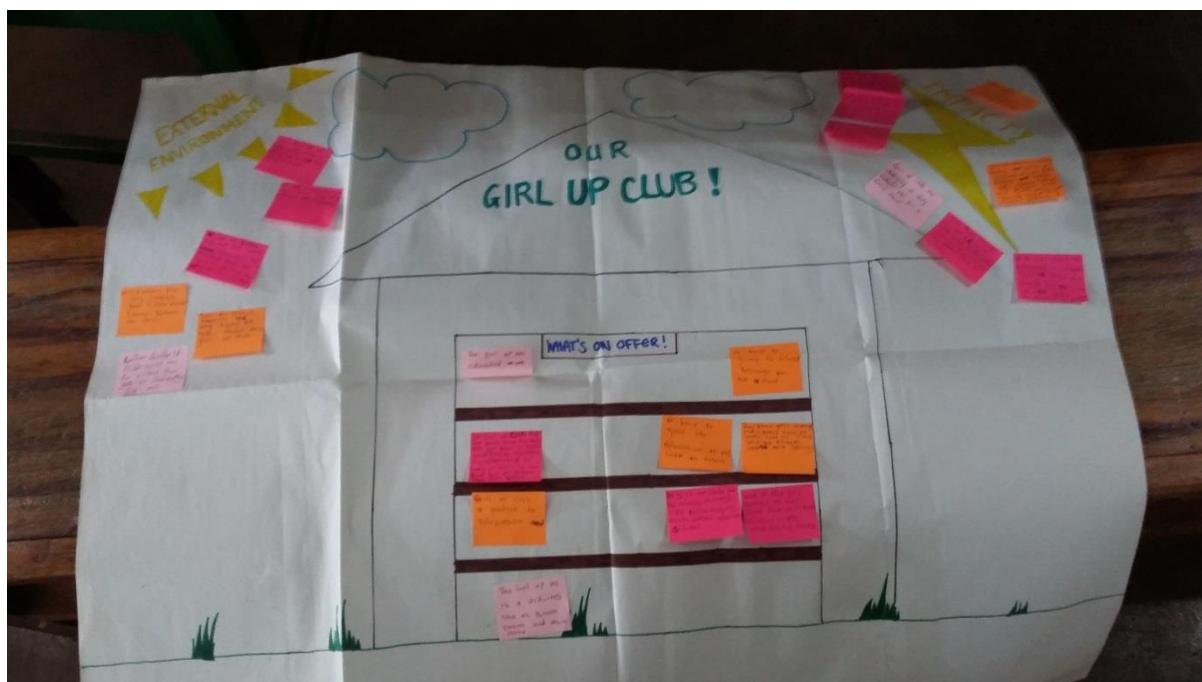


Figure 6: "Our Girl Up Club" flip chart sheet used during second focus group



Figure 7: "Girl Up Club Member" flip chart sheet used during second focus group